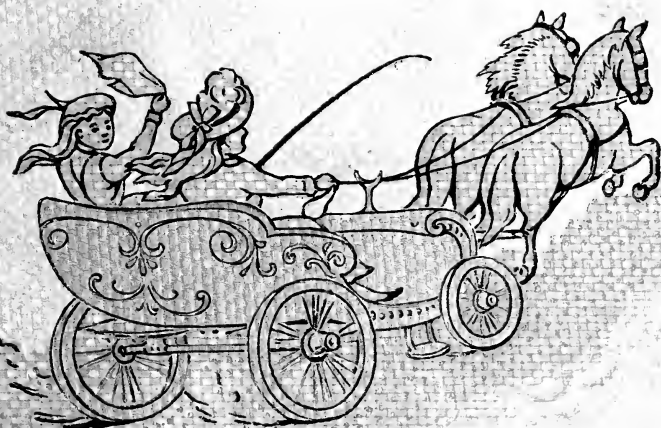


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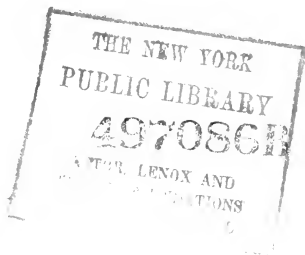
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CHAPTER I.

THE CHARIOTEER.

The door opened and the doctor entered the room where Ruth lay upon her bed suffering great pain caused by a thorn in her foot.

Having made a careful examination of the wound, the doctor announced that, with the aid of a morphine injection, the operation of removing the thorn would be almost painless.

Although Ruth had a dread of sleep-producing drugs, when brought face to face with this painful operation, she was scarcely willing to accept the assistance that the drug offered. But the word of her mother should decide.

"Mamma, must I be put to sleep with morphine?" The girl turned her pleading eyes to her mother's calm face.

"My child," replied the mother, caressing the wounded foot, "the morphine will be a merciful friend to you; also, it will be a great help to us, for you must be kept quiet while the operation lasts."

Ruth was a submissive child, prompt and ever ready to do her mother's will. "Then, I'm willing, good mamma," she assented rather cheerfully; "but," she added firmly, "you must promise to remain with me

that I may hold your hand until I come out of my sleep!"

The mother smiled assent, and without further delay the doctor with his needle made a tiny puncture in the skin just above the ankle of his patient. On the withdrawal of the needle Ruth felt a smarting sensation which the doctor overcame with a gentle pinch—and a smile.

Ruth's eyes began to wander from wall to ceiling. The enjoyment of sweet peace had begun. She felt that gratifying freedom from pain which induces sleep, and readily yielded to its soothing influences. It seemed that some one was pulling on the ankle of her sore foot, that her leg was stretching like rubber, and that the further it stretched the less pain she felt. Her mother, seated near her, clasping her hand, appeared sitting in a distant corner of the room, and the doctor, who lately had been at the footboard of the bed, seemed to have grown quite small, and he appeared to be as far away as she would wish to see him.

But the doctor had not gone away; neither had his stature decreased. He stood leaning over the footboard of the bed, probing for the thorn without hearing the slightest protest from Ruth. It was as if the member belonged to some other girl.

Ruth lay motionless, except that her breast rose and

fell with light breathing. Her eyes were calmly closed on wet lashes, and her cheeks were stained with recent tears. She had gone into Dreamland, the doctor said.

From her bed of pain Ruth seemed to feel herself transported through the air to regions new, and at the end of her journey she found herself seated upon the summit of a great white summer-cloud that opened its broad folds beneath her, almost concealing the world from her view. Through a small rift in the cloud she saw far beneath her, the green fields of her home, the scattered wood, pastures and streams, which suggested to her mind a huge map. But the opening was quickly closed by the rolling of the vapory masses, and except the sun above her, the cloud alone was visible, rolling, tossing, dipping, tumbling like an iceberg in the sea.

Rising to her feet, Ruth ventured to walk about on the soft folds of the cloud. It was like walking on a snowdrift, except that there was no sound of crushing ice. As her eyes strayed over the wide area her mind became confused, and she was bewildered by its splendor. She breathed the sweet air and felt her courage returning. In her heart she felt exquisite pleasure, such as gods and goddesses enjoyed on the Olympian height, in the day of fable. Her cheeks received the soft caresses of the eddying breezes, and her feet felt

the grateful, cooling touch of the vapory mass upon which they pressed.

Exclamations of happy surprise burst from her laughing lips.

"This must be Fairyland!" she declared to herself. Before she realized that it was not a land at all, the sound of her own voice startled her, for her words seemed to roll away through space, and there was not even the voice of a returning echo. With hands clasped, the startled girl paused to listen.

Tink-a-link-a-link-a-link, tink, tink, tink!

Bells!—the sweet voice of silver bells! The sound reminded her of moonlight sleighrides over plains of snow.

Tink-a-link-a-link, tink, tink, tink!

The bells sounded nearer, and although Ruth strained her ears she failed to locate the sound. She thought of fairy queens riding in fine carriages with their attendants. To the imagination of her childhood how grand a fairy queen had seemed! Radiantly beautiful, extravagantly rich and perfectly happy! Might she not hope to meet one of those fair creatures outside the bright covers of the story book? Surely she stood in the land of the marvelous. The place was far too grand and beautiful to be the habitation of creatures

less dainty than fairy folk! Oh, the suspense of waiting for light and knowledge.

Tink-a-link-a-link-a-link, tink, tink, tink!

Near at last—very near!

Suddenly, like a burst of sunshine through a cloud appeared before her—not a fairy queen in flowing robe, gold and jewels—but a radiant youth, a soul of light, clothed in glory, riding in a gold chariot drawn by a span of tiny, all white ponies! He was a tall, fair boy in sun-white robe, with crimson mantle. His lips were red as rubies, his eyes deep blue, his curls long and golden, and his brow was fair as the snow.

The ponies were smaller than Shetlands, but, proud of their beauty, they pranced, full of life. They were not real flesh and blood, however, but creatures of pure light, and they were swift as thought. The harness of silk and gold were substantial, though fine as spider's web. To the gold-mounted collars were made fast circles of silver bells that tinkled constantly with every movement of the restless steeds. And the chariot? Pure gold, every ounce of it, except the silk upholstered seats, which were filled with softest down. Light as a balloon, dainty as a sea-shell and more beautiful than a fairy's cradle!

"I wonder," thought Ruth, her eyes straying from the fair face of the youth to the prancing ponies, and

from the ponies to the car, "I wonder who he is, and what he's going to do?" While she gazed the charioteer drew rein on the ponies, halting them almost at her feet.

Ruth remained silent, motionless. Even her eyes became fixed and staring. She realized that her attitude was not one of respect; but for the moment she was powerless to move. Surprise often places one in a graceless attitude, and sometimes leaves one in a helpless condition, also.

The youth pleasantly smiled, saluting with graceful hand and addressing with pleasing tongue:

"I greet thee, lady Ruth; the blessing of the day to thee, oh, lady fair!" As he spoke he stepped from the car and stood in respectful attitude before the confused and blushing girl.

Ruth, partly recovering from her surprise, nodded pleasantly; but her tongue would not help form the words she wished to speak. The charioteer, observing her embarrassment, instantly came to the rescue with—

"Have I kept thee waiting, lady beautiful?"

At the sound of these pleasing words Ruth's tongue was loosed from the bonds of surprise. "Oh, no, sir!" answered she, "I am not waiting—I—" She blushed again, overcome with confusion.

Again the charioteer came to her rescue. "I have

the honor to be messenger to His Celestial Majesty, the King of the Air, who hath sent me to thee with ponies and chariot for thy special use." He bowed very low and smiled.

Ruth was filled with wonder. "For-thy-special-use!" she repeated mentally. Then she was lost in the contemplation of the shining beauty of the messenger's face. "After all," she concluded, "this may be a dream!"

The servant of the king began to explain: "Thou hast forgotten, perhaps, that less than a week ago thou didst make a wish that thou mightest be transported to the stars in a car of gold—hast entirely forgotten thy wish, lady grand?"

The sudden recollection then came to Ruth that she had made some such fanciful wish. "I do recollect," she answered, after some hesitation. "I made the wish one day when with my cousin Ruby."

"And thy good cousin—where now may she be?"

"She is at her home which is—on the—earth, wherever that may be."

"The King bade me inform thee, lady noble, that thy cousin is to accompany thee on the journey that thou wilt make to the stars."

"Shall we go to the stars—the high, high stars?" Ruth was so well pleased with the prospects of a heav-

only journey that she, forgetting her reserve, clapped her hands joyfully and hopped over the clouds like a snow-bird on a drift. "Oh, the dear, good old king!" she exclaimed with grateful enthusiasm.

The charioteer smiled. He did not strive to conceal the fact that he was well pleased with the appearance of Ruth. Have we not found in the books numerous instances in which fairies and other airy beings have given every treasure in their possession to win or to please mortals whom they love or admire? It is no surprise, then, to learn that the eyes of the king's messenger found new and sweet pleasure in the contemplation of the innocent beauty of our little friend. "If thou wilt kindly step into the car, lady gay," said he, standing ready to assist her, "it shall be my pleasure to drive with thee to the home of thy cousin." He made a low bow and met her eyes with a kind smile.

Ruth, assisted by the messenger, entered the car and took a seat. The messenger followed, seating himself on the opposite side of the car. A light tap of the silken reins started the impatient ponies on their journey down the long line of clouds which descended gradually, meeting the earth at the far away horizon.

"Beauty! Bright!" At the sound of their master's voice the ponies quickened their pace until their speed was very great. The clouds appeared passing under

the chariot like the tide of a rushing stream. No clatter came from the ponies' nimble feet, no sound from the tiny wheels; but the silver bells chimed merrily as the car rolled on.

Ruth found herself clinging to the seat with one hand, to her straw hat with the other. For a time her brain was in a whirl; the wind blew away her breath and rudely snatched at her flying curls. Her ears were confused, and her eyes were filled with a mist of excited tears. But these annoyances were overcome and she began to enjoy the ride.

The charioteer, wishing to leave Ruth to the undisturbed enjoyment of the situation, did not speak for several minutes. The morning was clear, warm, beautiful; and when Ruth had recovered courage to release her hold on the seat she cast an admiring glance on the world beneath her. A broad area of green dotted with half a dozen villages and crossed by many streams was within the horizon of her view. She gazed with silent admiration on wide pastures of purple-blossomed clover, on fields of gold and green—ripe wheat and growing corn—on scattered woods and winding streams, on shady hedges, narrow lanes and trailing paths. She saw men at work in the fields, plowing, reaping, haying. She saw cows and horses grazing in rich pastures, teams plodding along the dusty roads,

trains hastening over shining paths. In the wood, a thieving hawk sat in a swinging tree-top dreaming and scheming, across the plowed fields flew a solitary crow, over the bosom of the valley, bathing in the sunlight, swallows darted on skillful wing, and in the meadow, down by the stream, a dog chased a rabbit to its burrow in the hedgerow.

Although the earth was filled with industrious life, there was heard no sound, for the distance absorbed all; even the loud screech of the locomotive was lost in the intervening space.

The charioteer drew rein on his ponies, and Ruth, observing that he was about to speak, gave her attention.

"Lady kind"—the fair youth's voice was cheerful—"wilt thou locate for me the home of thy cousin Ruby?"

"With pleasure," answered Ruth, smiling. "She lives in the small white house on the hill, between the wide pasture and the great bend in the stream." With her finger she indicated the direction.

"I thank thee, lady cheerful." The messenger smiled when his eye had discovered the house. "In a few minutes we shall be there," continued the fair youth; "and now, with thy kind attention, I will deliver unto thee another part of the king's message." Ruth, with folded hands, waited with strict attention while the

messenger continued: "Thy cousin, the lady Ruby, will come with us into the chariot and we shall immediately return to the clouds. There, in accordance with the wish of His Majesty, I shall deliver unto thee both ponies and chariot, which shall take thee and thy cousin to the stars. Thou shalt venture no farther into space than the planet Mars; there thou wilt find adventure and enjoyment to thy heart's content. When thou hast reached thy journey's end, thou wilt set the ponies free to pasture in the sky, and as often as thou wilt, they will return to thee if thou wilt call their names in this order: 'Beauty! Bright!' Presently I shall teach thee how to fold the chariot and how to put it away." After a short pause the charioteer reached into a pocket in his robe and drew out a pair of tiny gold wands with diamonds set in their ends. "These are presents from His Majesty," he explained, his face beaming with a smile. "They are for thee and thy cousin. First of the many wonderful powers they possess, they capture a ray of light upon which two may ride with ease and comfort. So that, when the car is not preferred, thou wilt have at thy service a beam of light under perfect control of thy wand. Printed on the wand thou wilt find full directions for its use, also some advice, for it hath many uses and must be handled with skill and care. Please accept these, lady worthy, together with the

king's love." With a low bow he handed the wands to Ruth, who smiled gratefully, bowed gracefully and said—

"I thank His Majesty for his goodness and for his rich gifts to us ; and you, sir, I thank most heartily for bringing them to us."

The messenger seemed touched with Ruth's expression of gratitude. He had been wondering what she should say and how she would say it when he should deliver the king's gifts.

Not another word was spoken until the car drew up before the yard gate at the home of Ruth's cousin.

"Wilt thou kindly call to thy cousin that there may be no delay going into the house?" The messenger stepped from the car as he spoke.

Ruth called the name of her cousin, and almost instantly, as if she had been waiting, Ruby appeared, her straw hat on her arm and her curls flying. She had heard the sweet jingle of the bells, but the car and its passengers she did not see until she reached the gate in the high hedge fence. It was then too late to make retreat, for she had been seen. The smile on the face of her cousin gave her courage and she resolved at once to stand her ground.

The king's messenger bowed, smiled and said : "The chariot awaits thee, lady fair, and I will assist thee to



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a seat with thy cousin, the lady Ruth." And before she realized that she had been addressed by a messenger of the king of the Air, she had been helped into the car where she shared the seat with her cousin. Then, with a smile she thanked the messenger, who bowed, smiled and followed her into the car.

"Bright! Beauty!" Instantly the impatient ponies darted ahead, and soon the car was whizzing through the air up the long line of clouds to the sky.

"Lady fair"—the messenger addressed his words to Ruth—"wouldst thou learn the king's reason for granting thy wish?"

Ruth felt that it was due to the king's goodness, for she was not self conscious of having deserved any such favor; but she wished to learn the king's reason, and in answer to the messenger's question she smiled and answered with a modest "Yes, sir, if you please to tell."

"Thou knowest, lady charitable, that thou didst invite to thy party a poor girl who, through no fault of her own, hath few friends and little enjoyment—a good and kind girl who hath been cruelly misjudged and shamefully abandoned by thoughtless and selfish play-mates. And thou"—turning his smiling blue eyes on Ruby—"thou didst accompany this friendless girl to the party, and for charity's sake thou didst continue through the day to be her friend and companion, al-

though thy own companions seemed to despise her and even thee for thy charity toward her. Therefore, in his goodness, the king, to reward thee and thy cousin for thy deeds done in charity's name, hath sent this chariot to be thine own for a period of seven days. This beautiful car drawn by the faithful ponies shall convey thee to the world of Mars, where thou wilt remain 'til the morning of the seventh day."

When they had reached the summit of the cloud-mountain the charioteer again stepped from the car, saying: "Ladies favored of the king, I beg thee now alight that I may instruct thee concerning the car." He assisted the cousins from the car, and then, as they stood near, he spoke gently to the ponies: "Bright, Beauty, step up!" The tiny creatures obeying their master, went forward a step, and as they did so, the silken traces were detached from the gold hooks and the car stood alone!

The cousins were scarcely prepared for this pleasing surprise, and they were still staring when the charioteer spoke again: "Lady obliging,"—addressing Ruth—"wilt thou please lend me thy wand?"

"Cheerfully!" replied Ruth, passing the rod of gold to the smiling messenger of the king, who accepted it with a bow and continued his explanations.

"To put the car away for safe keeping, thou wilt

stand beside it—so”—he stepped to one side of the car —“and with a single wave of thy wand thou wilt cause it to be transformed into a cloth lying on the ground—so”—he waved the rod and the car lay spread on the cloud like a cloth of gold.

The cousins no longer could restrain their joy. “Oh, the good king and his jolly messenger!” cried Ruth.

“Long live the kind king and his noble servant!” added Ruby.

Then they felt that their enthusiasm had carried them away. But the face of the radiant youth became more radiant with smiles, and he bowed and bowed as if he were a willow, for he was flattered by the words which he felt were sincerely spoken.

After a long pause caused by the burst of enthusiasm from the grateful cousins, the messenger resumed his explanations. “To have the car with thee always,” he resumed, “thou wilt fold it like a handkerchief—thus.” Folding it, he handed it to Ruth with a smile and another bow.

“Wonderful!” cried Ruth.

“Marvellous!” supplemented Ruby.

The fair youth seemed greatly pleased. “To restore the car,” he said, concluding his explanation, “thou wilt unfold the cloth, take it by the corners—do thou as I teach thee, lady artful—” Ruth, following the instruc-

tions, unfolded the cloth, taking it by the corners—"snap it smartly, and as thou shalt see, the car will be restored!"

Ruth gave the cloth a short, sharp jerk and, marvelous to relate, the gold car reappeared and the ponies stood ready to be hitched to it. One wave of the wand caused the silken traces to fly into their hooks, and all was ready for the trip.

The charioteer assisted the cousins into the car, smiled, bowed twice—very low each time—and said: "May thy guardian angels preserve thee, and may they conduct thee safely home! Fare thee well, ladies fair and beautiful, fare thee well!" Before the cousins could form words for reply, the messenger of the king had disappeared in the clouds.

CHAPTER II.

ACROSS THE PLAINS OF THE SKY.

The cousins sat in the chariot smiling into each other's faces, Ruth holding the silken reins, Ruby taking care of the magic wands. Charming young girls with bright eyes, blooming cheeks, laughing lips and tossing curls; healthy, happy, gentle, modest. Never had they met with greater surprise, and surely never had they been happier.

The ponies pawed and pranced impatiently, awaiting

the word that should start them on their journey. They seemed to be aware of the fact that it was the hour for starting, and well they knew that the journey would be a long one, for more than once had they made the trip to the red old world of Mars.

"Are we ready for the start?" inquired Ruby anxiously.

"We are ready," answered her cousin; "but," she added, with hesitation, "how shall we—how—"

"Speak! what is it? You frighten me!" Ruby's eyes glistened with a sudden fear.

It was a puzzled look, not an expression of fear that was on Ruth's face. "We are about to begin our journey," she answered thoughtfully, "without knowing what direction to take. If the sun were not shining one could see the stars, and one could locate Mars."

"Yes, everybody knows Mars. He has a red face, but does not show it in daylight. I think, though, we may begin our journey, for when night comes—"

"Night?" interrupted Ruth, "you forget that our teacher told us that, if we should move away from the earth our night would cease."

"I recollect now; he said that night is the earth's shadow, but"—with a new hope—"when we shall reach the moon there'll be more night!"

"Where is the moon? I have not seen it since the evening of our party."

"Nor I. Perhaps it is playing hide-and-seek with the earth."

Ruth was silent for a moment. "It doesn't matter where the moon is," she said with confidence; "nor does it matter if at present we can not see the face of Mars! What silly chickens we have been to think that the good messenger would leave us to our own scanty knowledge of the stars! Shall we not trust to the ponies to find their way?"

"Oh, the dear little creatures!" Ruby cast an admiring glance at the ponies. "To be sure we may trust them, for the sky is their pasture, and why should they not be acquainted with all the roads leading to the stars?"

There was no more doubt; no further delay. Ruth with triumphant smile shook the silken reins over the ponies. "Bright, Beauty," she called, "take us to the planet Mars. Forgive us for being so stupid as not to have known that you understand your own business!"

The gay creatures quickly understood and in answer to the call of their mistress they neighed gladly and began to caper away over the clouds up into the clear blue sky. At the end of the line of clouds the cousins discovered a narrow road that extended into space.

This road resembled the Milky Way, and it was just wide enough to accommodate the wheels of the car.

There was no farther mistaking the direction, for there was but one path to follow. The ponies seemed quite familiar with it. They enjoyed the start, capering gayly, biting at each other in a playful manner, as ponies often do, especially when they find themselves on a familiar road leading to their home.

Their doubts and fears having been overcome, the cousins began to enjoy the novelty of the ride through boundless space, and for half an hour they remained in silent contemplation of their surroundings. But what is a journey without conversation? A little silence on some occasions is a good thing; but half an hour was a long period of time for the tongues of our travelers to keep silence, considering the opportunity for live conversation.

When at last the talking began, the great spectacle of the fathomless blue surrounding them was dismissed with a few remarks and their thoughts reverted to the messenger of the king. At the request of her cousin, Ruth related all that had happened from the time of the messenger's first appearance to the arrival at the gate where Ruby had met them. She recalled every word of the conversation; she remembered every smile, every bow.

"Who is he?" inquired Ruby, anxiously. "Did he not tell you his name?"

"His name is Light; he is an angel," answered Ruth calmly.

"An angel? I didn't see any wings!"

Ruth laughed. "I didn't either. I was excited most of the time; but," she added, thoughtfully, "angels do not have wings."

"Ruth!" Ruby seized the arm of her cousin, giving her a look of indignant surprise.

"Don't get excited, Ruby, jewel! In pictures angels are represented as having wings; but painting is art, and wings, in art, signify speed. Our teacher is my authority for that."

"Well," sighed Ruby, "teacher is good authority, but all the angels I ever have seen appeared to me in pictures, and they wore wings, every one."

"Mercury, messenger to the gods, is represented as having wings on his heels. One can not imagine anything except a spur on the heel."

"Oh, I can!"

"What?"

"A blister!"

Ruth turned to her cousin with a scolding smile "You dear, funny girl! Shall I kiss you for that?"

This ended the conversation about the messenger.

"How distant the world appears!" remarked Ruth, breaking the silence. "The largest groves are scarcely visible, and every house has disappeared from our view!"

To obtain a satisfactory view of the receding world Ruth drew on the reins, bringing the ponies to a walk. Then, leaning over the side of the car with eyes cast down, the cousins fell into silence while they gazed on the interesting scenes spread out beneath them.

Objects on the earth appeared to have diminished in size, while the earth itself appeared to have grown larger. The circle of their horizon enclosed not only the few hundred square miles that belongs to the horizon of one standing on the earth, but many million square miles—a space equal to the area of several states!

Rivers were traceable from source to mouth, appearing like huge silver snakes gliding over immense green fields. Snow covered mountains appeared through a heavy haze that lay like a veil over the face of the world. Immense areas of timberland were visible, enclosing like a frame great lakes that flashed back the light of the sun like huge mirrors. Vast level prairies, darkened here and there by shadows of passing clouds, lay between great mountain ranges, receiving their irrigating water from them. These and many

other interesting scenes spread themselves beneath the surprised and admiring eyes of the chariot's passengers.

"It's beautiful, wonderful!" remarked Ruth, turning her eyes to the ponies to learn whether they were keeping the road. "I wonder if—" she paused in astonishment.

Ruby noting the interruption in her cousin's speech, raised her eyes from the earth and was about to speak, but the same surprise that had interrupted her cousin's words hindered her own.

The sky was no longer blue, but black—so intensely black that the little observers were startled and filled with sudden, chilling fear. But the darkness was in the sky only. The sun was pouring his rays on them, and their shadows fell on the car. The rising moon and the stars, also, were visible. A remarkable change, to be sure, but a natural one. The chariot has passed from the earth's atmosphere into the ether which fills all space outside the worlds; but it had borne with it its own envelope of air, just as the earth moving through space carries with it an envelope of the same useful element. So, after all, the cousins were not left without fresh air to breathe.

The surprise of the travelers was soon supplanted by admiration for the splendid scenes so suddenly but beautifully portrayed in the sky. Ruby at once recog-

nized the glittering Orion followed by his faithful dogs, Sirius and Procyon, each with a star in his collar. She traced the imaginary outline of the Great Bear, that prowler about the pole star, pursued eternally by her ambitious but erring son, in whose belt gleams the eye of Arcturus. The sporting Dolphin, also, she discovered; the glowing Pleiades, the Winged Horse, and a dozen other well known constellations, the names of which she had learned only a few months before the beginning of this remarkable journey. But it remained for Ruth to discover Mars, recognized at once by his ruddy countenance beaming among the twinklers of the constellation of the Lion.

While they were still engaged in the silent contemplation of the starry groups, a new surprise overtook them. They found themselves in a zone of meteors. A shower of minute particles fell around them. There was not enough atmosphere surrounding the car to cause the particles to ignite by friction and become visible. But if they were invisible, they failed not to make themselves heard and felt. They rattled noisily, like hail, on the chariot, causing the ponies to leap and snort with excitement, and occasionally when a fragment happened to hit our friends on nose or cheek, or chin, loud exclamations fell from their lips. The duration of the shower was brief, however, and the sur-

prise that it brought gave way to another. On casting down their eyes they discovered on the carpeted bed of the car, hundreds of small grains that had fallen during the shower, and when Ruby stooped to examine them, imagine, if you can, the magnitude of her surprise on discovering that the little grains were genuine diamonds.

A shower of good luck, indeed! When Ruby had finished collecting the treasure she had two heaping handfuls which she bound up in her handkerchief, remarking that it would come handy in the world of Mars where they should need money or its equivalent. They had brought with them not so much as a penny.

"I'm certain," said Ruby, "that the good king, foreseeing our needs, sent that shower to replenish our pockets!"

"Replenish, indeed!" observed Ruth with glistening eyes. "We now have a million dollars—more or less—in treasure."

A million dollars in diamonds tucked away in Ruby's pocket! What a bulk it made!

The ponies trotted along briskly, evidently glad to get away from the pelting shower. Ahead of the car the moon beamed like the headlight of a locomotive, while behind the car the earth grew dull and lost its magnitude in the increasing distance.

"Let us travel a little faster," suggested Ruby. "I'm anxious to get a close view of the moon. See"—she grew enthusiastic and leaning forward pointed with her finger—"see it's moving near our path!"

Ruth spoke to the ponies and they immediately responded by increasing their speed. As there were no stationary objects on the roadside to mark the rapidity of their flight, they remained in blissful ignorance of the fact that they were rushing through space at a rate of speed tenfold greater than that of the fastest express train!

But the moon, which Ruby was so anxious to see—it scarcely resembled itself. It appeared wonderfully large. Every minute—at least every five minutes—its size appeared to have doubled, until half the black sky was filled with its bulk. In general its appearance was about the same as the earth, but on closer examination one might have discovered many dissimilarities. There were mountains, plains, valleys, basins, plateaus, tablelands; but on the highest peaks there was no sign of snow; the plains were barren; the valleys were treeless; the basins were without water, and the plateaus had not even the cooling breath of the wind, for the moon is a desert world, without life and devoid of atmosphere. What a waste of land!

The cousins turned their eyes to the earth. A great

change had come over it since their last look upon it. Although much farther away, its brilliancy had increased and it had less of the appearance of a living, growing world. Continents, large islands, mountain ranges, plains and seas alone were visible. Rivers had hidden their courses in the distance, and even the smaller islands seemed to have sunk in the sea, for they were no longer visible. As the chariot rolled on with its passengers even the seas and continents appeared to blend and lose their outlines.

The moon, too, had undergone another change. Much of its brilliancy had been lost. New valleys, mountains, basins and plains too small for observation at a greater distance, came into view ; but on the whole, everything assumed a darker aspect, just as the earth on the contrary, had gained in brilliancy. This change in the moon was, of course, only apparent, like that of the earth, for the moon, being a dark body like the earth, shines only by reflected light.

The road led the cousins within a hundred miles of the lunar surface. Following a suggestion made by her cousin, Ruth brought the ponies to a slow walk. This gave an opportunity for careful observation of the lunar landscape.

There were no signs of life, either vegetable or human. The entire country was solitary, cheerless, silent

as a graveyard. Not a tree was there to shade the sun-parched hills; not a stem of grass to clothe the naked plain; not a drop of water to moisten the burning sands; not a cloud to float in the sky; not a solitary crow to wing his diagonal course over the lonely fields—not even an owl to sit and meditate over the ancient ruins! The place was uninviting indeed, for there was not an interesting feature there to turn the travelers from their route, even for a brief visit.

“Drive on!” muttered Ruby with a shudder. She seemed to feel something of the chill that lay shroud-like over the moon. “Drive faster; this is too lonely. The scene calls to my mind the thrilling lines from Hood’s poem—

“ ‘O’er all there hung a shadow and a fear;
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is haunted.’ ”

“I’m not anxious to tarry,” said Ruth lightly tapping the ponies with the silken reins. “It seems there’s no one at home there; and if the bright side of the moon is so lonely I do not care to see the dark side!”

The chariot wheeled away, leaving both earth and moon far behind.

Since the earth had passed from under their feet it seemed that the bottom had fallen out of the universe;

but the road was there to lead them on. It was distinctly visible leading straight to the planet Mars which, by that time, had grown quite large and bright. But Mars, attractive as he appeared, in his cloak of red, failed altogether to engage the attention of the little travelers.

A comet had been playing hide and seek behind the moon. Apparently it was about to cross the path just ahead of the chariot. In reality the comet was far away, but its size and appearance made it seem uncomfortably near—so near that Ruth felt that she ought to draw rein to allow it to pass. She had had an experience riding in a carriage, the driver of which had made an unsuccessful attempt to cross a graded track in advance of a train, and it had made an impression on her. It had made her cautious, and her caution at this particular time induced her to draw on the reins to bring the ponies to a sudden halt.

For a time the cousins sat in silence closely observing the villainous appearing comet.

"It doesn't appear to be moving," observed Ruby. "It may not be along here for two or three hours," she added with an air of wisdom.

"Shall we drive on, then?" asked Ruby, calmly, although her face was a trifle pale.

"I think we'll be as safe moving as waiting here. We

have no idea where it will go, so I think it is just as apt to catch us here as in any other place, if my opinion is worth anything." She nodded her head as if she thought her opinion well worth considering.

"Then we shall continue," concluded Ruth, tapping the ponies with the reins. She loved her cousin and respected her wishes, although she had her doubt as to the wisdom of driving near the long tailed monster of the sky.

On they rushed swift as the wind, Ruby singing to the stars, Ruth with her eye on the comet. They had reached a point midway between earth and Mars. The earth resembled a great white star, somewhat larger than Venus and much brighter. Mars increased his size and brilliancy, far outrivaling the splendid Sirius, which glittered near him. The comet, too, had grown both large and bright; but it appeared about as far away as ever.

An hour passed. The travelers were a few million miles nearer Mars who, with face almost as large as the moon's, smiled pleasantly, quite absorbing the attention of the passengers in the car

As if taking advantage of their inattention, the comet came rushing on with tremendous speed. The enormous tail being turned away, did not appear as long as it really was.

It was late when Ruth, filled with sudden terror, attempted to draw in the ponies, for they had taken fright at the threatening appearance of the fiery monster and charged ahead with all their strained might.

A few minutes and the comet would be upon them! Since it had become impossible for Ruth to manage the ponies, the only hope for escape was to go ahead; but that seemed impossible. The frightened girls made no attempt to remain in their seats. Sinking into the low bed of the car they permitted themselves to be bumped about like pumpkins in a wagon, Ruth heroically clinging to the reins, Ruby with her arms about her cousin's neck, and both saying prayers that they had been taught to say in time of danger.

The light of the comet, like that of a locomotive on a dark night, was blinding, and it appeared to their confused vision that the comet was a real living monster with wide open jaws, merciless teeth, blazing, rolling eyes, and hissing, steaming breath!

On it came in all its threatening fury as if anxious to devour its helpless prey. The ponies were in their wildest gallop. The car jerked, swayed, plunged like a boat in a rapids, threatening every moment to unload its brave but unfortunate passengers.

The poor girls thought of home, parents, friends and of many other things which the mind when stimulated by danger, calls up for consideration.

While they were still engaged in fearing, thinking, praying, the awful moment came. The ponies leaped high, causing the car to make a disastrous plunge. Ruth, while clinging to the reins with a desperation born of fear, was thrown against the dashboard with considerable force and stunned. A moment later, on recovering her senses, she discovered that Ruby was missing! Poor Ruby! Thrown from the car only to become entangled in the tail of the comet, and to be dragged, torn, mangled and perhaps roasted alive! The thought was about to become the despair of Ruth, when like an inspiration came a saving hope. The mist cleared from her excited eyes, and as she cast a glance over the side of the car her heart bounded with joy, for there, clinging to the outside of the seat she saw a pair of hands!

Ruby had been thrown over the side, but in falling she had secured a hold which she did not release. She retained consciousness, but excitement prevented her from crying out. In an instant Ruth had mastered the ponies by the power of a kind word. Her attention was then given to her cousin, whose wrists she grasped firmly. Bracing herself, she lifted with all her might, but in vain. Plucky and determined, she made another effort, but she found it quite impossible to lift the weight of her cousin. She felt her arms growing weak,

but her courage remained strong. She would not give up the rescue of one who was so dear to her.

Ruby's face was snow white, but the light of courage was in her eyes. She hung on the strength of faith and hope.

Once more Ruth exerted her strength, but to no avail. It seemed then that hope was fleeing; but a new plan suggested itself to the mind of Ruby.

"I'll hold my own weight while you rest!" she panted.

"I fear you can not hold!" replied Ruth.

"Then, let me go—say good-bye and let me go!"

"Not while I've strength to hold! Pray with your heart, cousin—God will send the help!"

"I can hold—let me try!"

Ruth trusted to one of her cousin's hands. Then, leaning far over the side of the car she passed her arm around the waist of Ruby. "Courage, cousin!" she said. "Get your elbow over as soon as you can, and I will save you!"

There was an expression of sweetest gratitude on the white face of Ruby, but her lips were unable to move. With strength that came from heaven Ruth drew her cousin up until her elbows rested on the side of the car. Then, after one more heroic effort on the part of Ruth, Ruby was safe in the car!

It had been a terrible trial to have to hang between

heaven and earth with only the support of her frail arms; but Ruby soon recovered both her strength and self-possession, and then she knelt with Ruth to offer to the Lord prayers of thanksgiving for their deliverance from a great danger.

In a little while the cousins were chatting over their adventure, recalling the thoughts that came to their minds as the danger was passing. Both had been badly frightened, and it was some time before their faces had their natural color restored.

Ruby who had a strange power of discovering things, by accident found something beneath the seat on which they sat. Drawing it from its place of concealment, she was surprised to find a beautiful box, neatly painted; but was slightly disappointed on finding on the lid, printed in gilt, these words: "Do not open me until you reach Mars."

The girls made a superficial examination of the box, but of course did not think of yielding to the temptation of curiosity to open it.

"We will make haste," said Ruth. "See, Mars is growing quite large. I can distinguish new seas and islands."

"Yes, make haste!" encouraged Ruby, "lest the comet return to attack us! And then," she added impulsively, "I'm anxious to see what's in the box!"

Ruth touched the ponies with the reins and they, responding to the touch, leaped into a swift but steady gallop that counted for a thousand miles a minute.

The way seemed clear with nothing ahead but the level path leading up to the planet. Behind them the sun gave out its lessening light. The earth, visible as a large white star, appeared more like a diamond than a living world, and the comet with which they had had the encounter dashed away through space, switching his tail among the frightened stars in a distant region of the heavens.

The seas and continents of the new world were plainly visible. The seas showing like great patches of green, and the continents of deep red, made beautiful contrast with the dazzling whiteness of the polar snows. A great tri-colored globe suspended in space before a sky of black, set with stars of various sizes and many hues!

The car having rolled on for another hour reached the atmosphere of Mars and another miraculous change came over the universe. Instantly the sky resumed its natural color, and the tri-colored globe appeared even more beautiful in its newly donned robe.

"How beautiful!" supplemented Ruth, with a glad smile.

Great clouds floated in the air, but the chariot dashed

through and descended to the surface of the planet on a bright red meadow where the ponies stopped of their own free will.

The cousins inhaled a breath of air fresh and sweet with incense of wild flowers, and then, with words of joy on their lips and true gratitude in their hearts, they stepped upon the soil of the new world; and as Columbus and his sailors had done on reaching the shore of the new continent, they knelt to return thanks to God for their safe journey across the lonely plains of the sky.

CHAPTER III.

ON TO THE CITY.

The cousins having surveyed the country with their eyes, became anxious to explore it—if a civilized country can be explored; but first they would open the box that Ruby had found under the seat.

There was no key, but a touch of Ruby's wand caused the lock to turn and the lid to fly open. Let us see what the box contained. As soon as Ruby had recovered from the shock of surprise she received on the opening of the lid, she reached in and drew out a pair of robes made of beautiful blue silk! Then she drew out a pair of scarlet mantles of the same rich material. Next, she found a pair of bonnets made of woven

leaves and flowers! What next? A pair of red sashes, two pair of light silver-mounted sandals with fine silk stockings neatly folded in each pair. All these to be worn on special occasions, of course.

Reaching a last time into the box, Ruby drew forth two fine silk flags—one, the Stars and Stripes, the other, the flag of Elysium, one of the great nations of Mars.

The flags were placed side by side on the front of the chariot; then all the silk and colored finery was replaced in the box, and the girls were ready to start on their journey. The ponies heard the word and obeyed immediately. They found the country road less level than the path they had followed through space; yet there was no unpleasant jolting of the car, as its wheels were provided with rubber tires.

Abandoning the plain after half an hour's ride, the travelers entered a wood, following a narrow, but level road that led into the heart of the forest. It was very like any other forest except that the tree trunks were grayish, and the limbs reddish, while the foliage was pink and scarlet. Growing among the trees were found bushes and vines bearing fruits and berries that were tempting to the eye; but the girls did not think it wise to eat fruits and berries that were new and strange to them.

Many miles of the great forest had been traversed by the young explorers, but no incident of note had broken the monotony of the journey.

"I think it is time the people of this country show themselves!" remarked Ruth after a long silence spent in observing the many strange things around them.

"Indeed it is!" asserted Ruby with a nod of her head and a toss of her curls. "Since we have undertaken and finished a journey of several million miles, braving as we have, the lonely plain and the comet, and the ghostly land of the moon, it seems to me that we deserve some kind of reception! Still"—with a small note of sarcasm in her tone—"we should not expect to find enlightened people that give receptions living here in the woods!"

"Hush, Ruby, dear! Men that are wise and good, as well as men that are uneducated live in the woods. We have had at least one president whose home was in the heart of the forest; nevertheless he succeeded in hewing his way out."

"That's true. I should have thought of Lincoln—and others—before speaking."

At that moment the sound of a woodcutter's axe fell on their ears.

"Another man hewing his way out!" remarked Ruby with a smile of surprise.

When they had rounded a turn in the road they caught sight of a small man with pink complexion, dressed in queer clothes, chopping with his axe at an immense tree which he had just felled, and which lay across the road, making a complete obstruction. As the car approached noiselessly the woodchopper was heard talking to himself.

"I hope I'll get it out of the way before anyone comes," he was saying. "I can't afford to pay a fine for obstructing the road." He continued his soliloquy, delaying his work only to wriggle out of his coat and to discard his odd little hat. The hat off, the color of his hair was revealed. Like almost everything else in that strange world his hair was of a ruddy hue.

"Poor little man," muttered Ruby, with a pitying smile, "he has had ill luck with his tree and is in need of help!"

"Help that we can give," said Ruth. And as they drew near she pulled rein on the ponies.

At the sound of their voices the woodcutter glanced for the first time in their direction. The sudden fear that seized him showed on his face in an expression of helplessness. Even his hair took part in the surprise by standing on end like the fur of an angered cat.

As he had seemed to fear, some one appeared on the scene before he had had time to clear the way, and ac-

ording to a law of the country he had made himself liable to pay a fine for obstructing the public highway. Is it any wonder that the poor man surrendered himself to fear and surprise?

The cousins observed that the man's knees trembled violently, threatening to knock together, although his legs were slim and considerably bowed.

Moved to pity, Ruth hastened to calm the man's fears. "Good man," she said with an encouraging smile, "I beg to assure you that you need have no fear on our account!"

The man's small eyes blinked oddly and the muscles of his thin and wrinkled face twitched nervously.

Ruth spoke again. "Seeing the plight you are in," she said, "we should be glad to assist you!"

"Yes," said Ruby, assuringly, "let us help you out of your trouble, will you?"

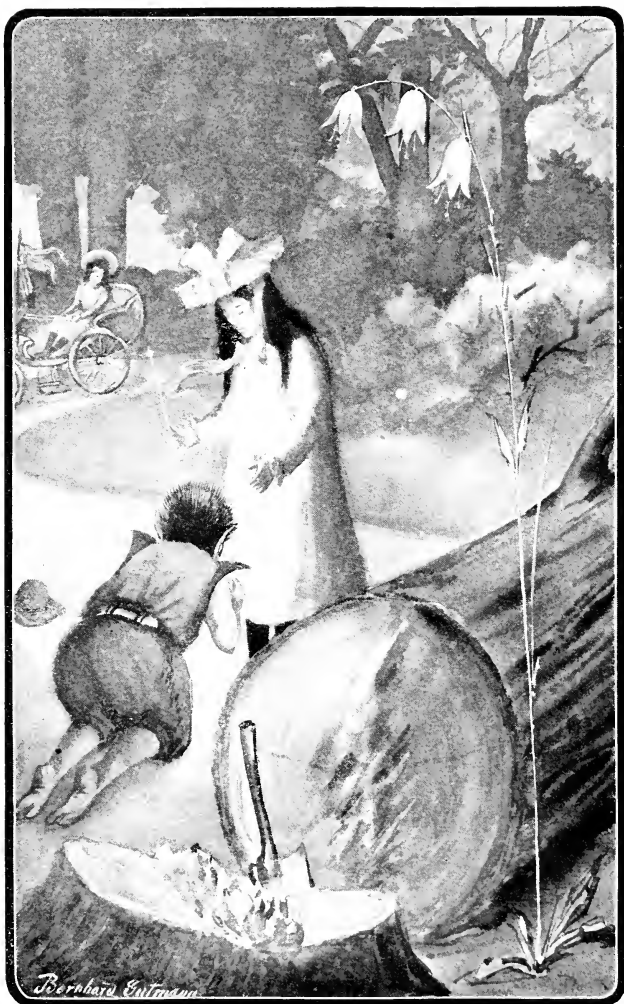
The man appeared stupid. His eyes continued to blink, and the girls began a struggle with their mirth. There was something rather comical in his appearance. "Here I am," he seemed to be thinking, "in the presence of two fair young princesses who address me, offering me aid! Royalty condescending to notice me, a poor woodcutter, hatless and coatless this unfortunate minute!" After a moment's pause he seemed to realize that he had forgotten something, and fell upon his

knees beside the log. With hands clasped in supplication, and with eyes turned heavenward, he waited for the cousins to speak once more.

"Shall we not assist you?" asked Ruth with a significant glance toward Ruby, who held her wand in readiness.

"Royal ladies do not swing axes!" thought the woodcutter, his jaw dropping with awe, his eyes glistening with surprise. "In what other way can they assist me? The log must be cut into small lengths, and since the ladies can not chop wood, of what assistance can they be? And as for lifting—" He paused in his mental debate, and his small face became wrinkled, resembling a peanut, and he was about to smile; but the recollection of his sorry plight came to him and all merriment was promptly subdued. The wrinkles left his face and he continued to kneel with hands clasped and with eyes directed heavenward. Occasionally he cast a side glance in the direction of the girls, which made it appear that he did not altogether trust them.

Ruby stepped from the car, wand in hand, and as she approached the little man he fell on his face muttering whining cries. "Come, friend," she said, bending, touching his shoulder gently, "whom are we, think you? Pick yourself up. See, we are plain, every day girls! I'm sure you think we are queens, expecting honors to be paid us!"



Ruby stepped from the car, wand in hand, and as she approached the little man, he fell on his face

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The man rose slowly, with trembling. Ruby smiled to encourage him, and encourage him she did, for when she smiled, courage and cheerfulness came to heavy hearts and lightened them just as the sunshine gives life to the flowers.

At last the little man found words to speak. "The log, lady—" he began, his bead-like eyes glistening, "the log lies across the road and—"

"Good man, we are ready to help you remove it. See?"—she touched the log with her wand—"it moves—big, lazy log that it is!" And it rolled to one side, leaving the way clear.

The frightened look returned to the woodman's face and his crooked legs renewed their trembling. No doubt, he believed that Ruby was a witch; and, as we all know, woodmen are afraid of witches.

The way being clear, Ruth drove up to the spot and her cousin stepped into the car with her.

"I—I am unable to pay you for your valuable assistance," stammered the woodchopper. "I am very poor—almost penniless."

"We expected no pay," replied Ruby; "we are satisfied to have had an opportunity to be of service to one in need."

The man's eyes brightened and his face beamed with gratitude. "Perhaps," said he nervously, "perhaps I

can do something in return for your kindness? Do you need a guide?"

"Thank you; we shall not need a guide, but we should be pleased to learn something about this country which is strange to us. We shall, with your kind permission, ask a few questions concerning the places we are intending to visit."

The man's face exhibited signs of real pleasure, for he was glad to be of service to those who had been so kind to him. He answered all their questions, giving them considerable information. He gave a special description of a great walled city which, as he said they should reach at the end of the road, outside the wood. He counseled them to arrive in good time, and cautioned them that, at six o'clock, the city gate would close for the night.

Before taking leave of their friend, the little pink man, Ruby dropped a few diamonds in the palm of his hand, and as they hastened away she sent back to him one of her encouraging smiles.

The woods were filled with attractions for the travelers and more time than they had to spare was spent in sight-seeing. But all the curiosities in the world of Mars could not have destroyed the healthy appetites with which our friends were blessed; and since they had eaten nothing since the rising of the sun, it is small

wonder that they had begun to feel the sharp thrust of hunger's lance.

The ponies were encouraged to increase their pace and, although they trotted lively during the remainder of the journey, the town clock was striking six as they dashed over the last mile of road! In the same moment the great gate swung on its hinges and closed with a bang that jarred the high wall in all its circumference of eighteen miles!

The chariot dashed up to the gate, but the bolt had been driven into place and it would so remain for twelve hours.

"Too late, ladies!" cried the gate-keeper from his window in the wall. Anxiety showed on his face as he spoke, for he quickly observed that the late arrivals were strangers; also, the faces of the cousins betrayed their feeling of disappointment. They were not only hungry, but quite weary, for they had been sight seeing for six hours!

They would take courage and ask a favor of the gate-keeper. Would he open the gate for just a moment? Surely a moment or two would not matter, they thought.

But they were informed in politest language that, according to law the gate must not open again until six o'clock on the following morning; also that it would be

impossible to open the lock before that time, without breaking it.

The keeper appeared uneasy, and no doubt he was sorry, for being a gallant man, he disliked to close the gate against ladies; but duty is a stern director.

Near to the gate, beneath the window, grew a large apple tree, its branches burdened with tempting fruit. The gate-keeper was not blind; he caught the longing glances cast by the hungry girls in the direction of the tree. Wishing to anticipate their wishes he came from his window down a stone steps, carrying on his arm a small basket. This he filled with well-chosen fruit, and with a bow almost as graceful as the charioteer's, offered it to Ruby, who was nearest.

Ruby with a nod and a smile thanked him, and from his manner one might judge that he was prouder of being the recipient of a smile from the lady of the car than he was of his position of gate-keeper.

To have taken the peels from the apples would have consumed much valuable time, even had the girls had knives for that purpose, for hunger was pressing in its demands. Ruth, giving her apple a turn to bring up the red side, took a generous bite, while Ruby, a trifle more thoughtful and perhaps less hungry, proceeded to break her apple in halves by pressing it against the dashboard of the car.

"I'm very sorry," said the gatekeeper, who was a handsome fellow dressed in gay uniform, "I am very sorry not to be able to accommodate you, since it is many miles to the next city, which I fear you shall not be able to reach to-night." He had, of course, no idea of the capabilities of the little creatures that were hitched to the car.

"Oh, thank you!" said Ruth; "but we should not wish to ask you to disobey orders. Being strangers, we could not have known of the laws and customs of the city. But perhaps you would not object to our employing our own power against the wonderful lock?"

The keeper's eyes suddenly lost their calm grace and for a moment Ruth was subjected to a rude stare. Before the gate-keeper could speak Ruth continued—

"If we succeed in opening the gate, shall we be permitted to enter the city?"

"Yes, indeed, lady!" answered the man in undisguised surprise. "If you shall succeed in opening the lock without injury to it, the city will be thrown open to you; also you shall receive a large reward that the city government offers to the person that shall open the gate between the hours of 6 p. m. and 6 a. m. The reward has been offered by the authorities because they wish to learn if such a thing is possible."

"Then, we have permission to make the trial?"

"You are at liberty to try at any time and to make as many trials as you choose."

The man was smiling, but there was surprise on his face. He had discovered the flags that waved over the dashboard of the car. One of these he recognized immediately; but the other, which was marked with stars and bars, he had never seen.

"Kind sir, I assure you"—Ruth selected another apple from the basket as she spoke—"I assure you that the opening of the gate will be as easy for us as is the eating of these good apples that you were so kind as to give to us, although the performance of opening the lock will give us less satisfaction than the eating of the fine fruit. With your kind permission, we will perform the task at once." Concluding, she turned with a smile to her cousin—"Open it, Ruby, and let us go in."

There was left on the core of Ruby's apple just one more bite. Having taken this, she threw away the core, took her wand and was about to step from the car when the man spoke.

"Wait a few moments, if you please," he said, with a detaining gesture. "I'll telephone the mayor, and he and the people that shall care to witness the opening will be here in a short time. Please to eat fruit while you wait."

"Thank you," said Ruby, selecting another apple and asking her cousin to name it.

The keeper, nervous with excitement, rushed up the stone steps to his office in the wall. In a short time he was at the telephone telling the mayor of the city that "two fair young ladies were waiting at the gate, ready to prove their skill by opening the lock."

A quarter of an hour later the mayor, headed by soldiers and followed by hundreds of excited citizens appeared at the gate. The cousins sat in their car struggling with a fear akin to stage fright, for they felt the burning gaze of a thousand curious eyes.

The high officials having passed through the gatekeeper's office, stood in a group just outside the gate. The top of the wide wall was literally lined with spectators. The hum of their voices was like the murmur of a waterfall; their subject was, the ladies in the car.

At a signal from the mayor a trumpet sounded proclaiming silence. Almost instantly every voice was silent; but all ears—and many mouths—were open.

"I understand," said the haughty mayor, addressing himself to the cousins, "that you claim to have power to open the great lock on the gate of our city?"

"We have that power, sir," replied Ruby. There was a slight tremor in her voice, for she realized that she was addressing the mayor of a great city, who, ac-

according to her judgment, was much less of a gentleman than the gate-keeper. He stared at her so boldly and his manner was so displeasing that she did not choose to have many words with him. So she did not think it necessary to make any further explanations.

"Then, fair lady"—the mayor smiled almost disdainfully—"you may proceed with your incantations!" By word and act he proved himself both vain and foolish. His insinuating words suggested a challenge, and Ruby, accepting them in that spirit, stepped from the car and with a courageous smile advanced toward the gate. All the high officials except the mayor himself, courtesied as she passed. The trouble with him was, that his son, who was a machinist, had failed on many occasions to open the gate lock when it had been announced that he should do so; hence, the thought of another succeeding where his son had failed, was quite enough to cause the old fellow to lose self-control.

Ruby stood within reach of the great lock that no skill had hitherto been able to open. A deep silence came over the assembly. Even the mayor seemed anxious, for it was noticed that he breathed by jerks. Gracefully she raised her arm, holding in her trembling fingers the shining wand that was to do the wonderful work. She appeared so brave, calm and beautiful that there was not a heart in the crowd, with the exception of the mayor's, that was not won to her.

Slowly Ruby's arm descended and the golden rod touched the lock. There was heard a heavy metallic sound like the falling of an iron bar on a stone. The bolt had been driven back! The crowd still remained in strained silence. Slowly turning, meeting the irate gaze of his lordship, the mayor, Ruby with a graceful bow and a smile of triumph announced—

“The bolt has been driven back without injury to the lock!” Then there was a roar of applause that was quickly silenced by a blast from the trumpet, by order of the mayor.

After a pause, Ruby's wand again touched the lock. Immediately the machinery started and the great gate began to open.

Ruby stood triumphant. Smiling, she waited for Ruth to drive up to the open gate, while cheer after cheer arose from the excited multitude.

Again the trumpet sounded the signal for silence, and the mayor, somewhat subdued in manner, began to address the crowd. He had caught some of the enthusiasm which filled the air. “Ladies and fellow citizens,” he said, in tones that betrayed forced grace, “we have had the honor to witness almost a miracle, for, as we all know, the city gate has not been opened during the evening hours for more than a century. The fair lady with the magic rod has performed a task

that not even the most noted of our skilled inventors could have performed. Let us, then, congratulate the ladies and make them our honored guests. It shall be the pleasing duty of the citizens to entertain them. I hereby make announcement that the prize of \$50,000, which has been offered to the person or persons who should succeed in opening the lock is to be paid out of the funds of the city treasury to the distinguished ladies, at eight o'clock tomorrow morning." Then turning toward Ruby who stood waiting at the open gate, he said in cheerful tones: "Behold, the city is yours—drive in!"

"We thank you, honorable sir," said Ruby with a pleasant smile. "We shall be pleased to make at least a short visit in your fair city."

Ruth drove up with the car and Ruby stepped in with her and was triumphantly driven through the gate into the city, amid the loud cheers of the excited throng which followed after to get a fair view of the ladies with the miraculous power.

The cousins were escorted to the city hotel where a reception committee took them in charge.

With a wave of her gold rod Ruth unhitched the ponies, and with a word sent them to their grazing in the meadow of the sky. The beautiful creatures by disappearing like a flash of light from a mirror, caused considerable surprise among the hotel people.

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Out into the dining room walked Ruth and her cousin
arrayed in royal robes

Ruth calmly proceeded to take care of the car, while the astonished people looked on in trembling silence. With another wave of the wand she caused the car to lie like a cloth on the marble pavement. Then, picking it up, she carefully folded it and tucked it under her belt. On witnessing this, every member of the committee exhibited signs of genuine surprise. Evidently they expected the transforming to go on until the ladies themselves should have been changed; but in this they were disappointed.

When they had been left to themselves in their own room at the hotel, the cousins prepared to dress in their rich apparel. Unfolding the cloth of the car, they found the box containing the finery, which was quickly donned by them. Ten minutes later when the door was opened by a maid, out into the dining room walked Ruth and her cousin arrayed in royal robes! The transformation had been complete, and it is small wonder that the dining room committee stood filled with awe!

A good supper awaited them. When, at the beginning, the cousins proceeded with informal grace to enjoy the meal, one might have read expressions of true gratitude on the faces of the ladies of the committee, for it was a great relief thus to be rid of strict formality. In return for this concession by the guests, the

ladies did all in their power to enliven the conversation and to increase the pleasure of the occasion.

The apples that the cousins had eaten had a stimulating effect on their appetites, and although they ate slowly, giving ample time for pleasing conversation, they ate none the less heartily.

From the dining room they were received in a cozy parlor, rich with beautiful furnishings. Here they were entertained for an hour by the mayor, his wife and their young daughters. From the mayor's family they learned much of value about the world of Mars, in return for which information they interested their friends by giving a description of the earth, and a short account of their long journey through space.

At nine o'clock, sleepy and weary, they retired to their room for the night's rest. Promptly at six in the morning they were awakened by the striking of the town clock which announced the time for the opening of the gate, and half an hour later they appeared in a private dining room where a dainty breakfast was served.

After breakfast an hour was spent in the reception room with the state governor, the mayor and their families. The governor invited the cousins to drive with him through the city and his invitation was promptly accepted.

The drive was taken through the principal streets, the cousins occupying seats with the beautiful fifteen-year-old twin daughters of the jovial governor. Of course, it was not so grand a ride as they had had in their own car of gold, but it was a delightful experience to be dressed in royal finery while riding with distinguished people through the wide streets of the state capital!

It was ten o'clock when the governor's carriage drew up at the hotel. There the cousins took leave of their friends and received at the hands of the free-hearted governor many gifts and tokens. The mayor offered them the prize money for the opening of the gate, but it was politely declined because the lock had not been opened by mechanical means. They had not opened it because they wished to win the prize, but because they wished to get in and get a good meal!

When all their distinguished friends had disappeared, like sensible girls they exchanged their fine robes for their plain and more comfortable gingham, and prepared to journey on.

Ruth called the ponies which instantly appeared, much refreshed by their rest, and a moment later the car was ready for a trip in the country. They dashed with lightning speed through the city, so that the citizens scarcely recognized them in their traveling dresses

of gingham; but at the gate they stopped long enough to again thank the kind-hearted gate-keeper for the apples he had given them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TREE HAG.

The cousins in their car drove over prairie and meadow until noon. At the noon hour they drew rein to rest and take dinner. They selected a beautiful spot on the grassy bank of a silver stream, in the shade of a quiet grove.

How fondly nature cares for her own! She is ever preparing quiet nooks where her weary children may find rest for both mind and body. And how jealously she guards those retreats from the intrusion of all foes to peace and rest! Only blessings are permitted to enter those sacred precincts—such as the happy birds with their cheerful songs, the flowers with their smiling faces, the breeze with its refreshing breath, streams with their dreamy lullabies, springs with their reviving drops, and over all the quiet shade to extend her protecting wings

The girls having decided to travel on foot for the remainder of the day, folded the car and sent the ponies to their pastures in the sunlight. They could not have found a more delightful spot to take their midday meal.

They had brought with them no food. What, then, should they find to eat? A careful reading over of the directions contained on the wands discovered to them this comforting sentence: "Kiss the diamonds and call for food."

Following this direction, the cousins kissed the diamonds set in the ends of their wands, and in a second there appeared before them a handsome table with a snow-white cloth, covered with a pleasing variety of food. Porcelain plates, dainty cups and saucers, gold-plated knives and forks, crystal goblets, and even a comfortable chair for each!

Let us see what they had to eat. In the center of the table sat a crystal jar filled with pure nectar; nearby, a plate of the whitest, softest bread, cut in small pieces and ready to be eaten with the nectar. A small pitcher of iced dew sat within easy reach. A small glass of it taken would restore their strength after their rough journey over the country. How it sparkled when they poured it into the cup!

What else? A plate of wild game—partridge and quail—a bowl of rich brown gravy, sauces, jellies and even pickles! There was a large cake alive with raisins and candies, and over it was spread a coat of real frost! And there were other things. Red apples, juicy oranges, fat peaches, big pears, fine grapes and

the sweetest strawberries with cream! Anything else? No; there was room on the table for no more good things.

The girls ate a little of everything, and when they had finished the meal they gave thanks for what they had received. Then, with a wave of their wands, table, chairs, cloth and all the good things disappeared. After an hour's rest in the cool, quiet spot, during which time they had read all the directions and instructions on the wands, they resumed their journey, traveling on foot.

They strolled over the level prairies, picking flowers, making bouquets and chatting on their way. The prairie sloped down to a low meadow that was filled with a variety of blooming flowers. The air was filled with their mingled perfumes, and their extravagant beauty presented a scene that was most pleasing to the eye.

Passing from the perfumed meadow, the cousins entered a small wood in which one particular tree—a real giant—was noticeable. Instantly, on catching sight of this tree there came to the girls a recollection of a warning that they had found on the wand—"Shun the big tree!"

It is a well-known fact that prohibition creates curiosity, and that curiosity, in turn, makes temptation.

Eve, the many times great grandmother of all, to her bitter sorrow, was first to discover this truth.

"I wonder," mused Ruth, who stood gazing at the spreading branches of the tree, "I wonder what's at the tree that we must shun?"

"Danger, very likely," suggested Ruby, whose anxious eyes were fastened on the tree.

Ruth indulged in guesses. "I guess," she said with round eyes, "I guess it's deadly like the Upas tree!"

"There is no Upas tree," quietly asserted Ruby. "Papa says it is a hoax."

"And what is a hoax?"

"Why—it's—it's the Upas tree, I suppose!"

Ruth would not be discouraged in her guessing. "I guess," she ventured again, "I guess it's sacred!"

"Unlikely!" protested her cousin. "Why should we be warned to shun a sacred place?"

"Because people who are not wise sometimes wish to rush in where angels fear to tread!"

Ruby laughed and then: "That must be true, for I saw it in poetry somewhere!"

The girls became silent, absorbed in thought.

"I was wondering," resumed Ruby, after the silence, "whether it would be wrong to go near the tree to obtain a good view of it?"

Ruth's eyes opened with surprise. "Oh, Ruby!" she

cried, "Shall we dare to do it?" She felt in her heart that she should like to venture a little nearer, and she almost wished that Ruby would advise going a *little* nearer, at least.

Ruby's curiosity was working mischief in her heart. At first, she reasoned that it would be no more harm to take a good look at the tree from a distance; then, presently it occurred to her that it would be small risk to go nearer, since there was no intention of going quite up to it. "Shun the tree," she repeated to her mind—"what does that mean—to keep clear away?" She held debate with herself until she had discovered several excuses for venturing near the forbidden tree. Poor excuses are plentiful when one makes earnest search for them, but good excuses are not so easily found.

"I can't see the harm in going near enough to get a good view," declared Ruby.

"Nor I," said Ruth; "yet I'm a little afraid!"

"Of what, Ruth?"

"Something—I can't say what it is."

Ruby having succeeded in calming her own doubts and fears, was anxious to overcome those of her cousin. It was plainly to be seen that she was bent on satisfying her curiosity. She had more courage than her cousin. She was more daring; also she possessed a strong curiosity, which is a foe to peace.

It was curiosity backed by daring that led her lightly to consider the words of warning and to suggest a near approach to the forbidden spot.

A small path leading in the direction of the tree was found, and this they set out to follow, Ruby in the lead, Ruth at her heels.

"Others have visited the tree," they reasoned, "for the path is well beaten. Why should we avoid it? Perhaps"—they had many conjectures to make—"perhaps there is treasure there? Treasure tempts, but why should we yield to temptations of treasure—we who possess a pocketful of diamonds? If that is the reason for the warning we need fear no danger. It is not treasure, but pleasure that we seek."

The girls were fairly satisfied that they might proceed without direct disobedience or real danger, and with conscience silenced to a comfortable degree by a wonderful process of reasoning, they ventured on. It is strange that neither of them remembered a little quotation that they had often heard at Sunday school—"He that loveth the danger shall perish in it."

When within a few hundred feet of the tree they paused in astonishment. It proved to be much larger than it appeared. Certainly it was larger than any of the famous California giants. At the base of the trunk was an opening large enough to admit eight horses

abreast! In surveying with their eyes the high branches they discovered midway between root and branches a hole in the trunk from which issued a column of smoke. It was natural for them to suppose that the trunk had been fired, although below there was no fire to be seen. Where then, was the fire? This was their new curiosity, and to satisfy it, they ventured nearer, step by step, but with caution, for something seemed to whisper, "Danger! danger!"

They stood at last within a few feet of the giant, eagerly peering into the great opening in the trunk. But they could see no fire. They raised their eyes. The smoke continued to pour out of the opening high above their heads. Curiosity, like an impatient guide, led them on. Danger seemed far away. Indeed, they had forgotten all about the warning. They stood within the enclosure, filled with wonder. Presently Ruth ventured to speak. "What a wonderful tree," she said looking about cautiously; "but there's nothing here to harm us!"

"Not a thing," affirmed her cousin, "not even a monkey! If any big monster belongs here, he's not at home today." She laughed carelessly, for there was little fear in her heart at that moment.

At one side of the cavity the girls discovered an opening which proved to be the base of a stairway that

led up through the body of the tree. Had they reasoned a moment they must have concluded that the place was a dwelling; but they had more curiosity than reason—at that moment. They ventured step by step to ascend the stairway, finally reaching a second apartment that was almost as large as the first, but much darker. It was while groping about in this place that they heard footsteps, as if some one were following them, ascending the steps.

A sudden fear came over our young friends, and as they stood in the semi-darkness, scarcely daring to move or even to breathe, they remembered with sorrow the words of the warning—"Shun the big tree."

The sound of the footsteps ceased; evidently the person on the steps had stopped to listen. The cousins stared at each other in confusion. Fear had made them helpless, almost speechless. Again the footsteps were heard on the stairs. By that time the place appeared light, as is the case in darkened places when one's eyes have become accustomed to the dark. They fixed their frightened gaze on the top of the stairs where the comer, friend or foe, must appear. Their fears suggested that it was no ordinary person that was soon to appear, and the weight of the footsteps went to confirm the idea.

At last suspense gave way to fear and terror, for

there appeared at the head of the stairs a huge, ugly head crowned with shaggy red hair—the head of a hag, half brute, half human. A pair of large, red, rolling eyes met the shrinking gaze of the terrified cousins. The hag's mouth was filled with large, irregular teeth, her nose was flat, with distended nostrils, her wrinkled, bat-like ears were covered with bristling red hair, and her chin, long and bony, suggested the plowshare.

Our friends fell upon their knees to invoke the aid of their guardian angels, but their lips were dumb and their tongues were nerveless. The spectacle of kneeling girls seemed to arouse the anger of the hag. At one time in her life she led a good life, but she fell into wicked ways and, as a degenerate Christian despises those who remain faithful, so the hag hated and despised the cousins whose attitude of prayer had thrown her into a fit of rage.

With a cry of brutal satisfaction she leaped up from the last step of the stairs and stood confronting her prisoners. As she towered over them, grinning with cruel delight, they felt the light of her wicked eye penetrating their unhappy souls, and on their blanched cheeks they felt the foul heat of her panting breath.

"Lucky hag is old Tag, lucky hag is old Tag!" exclaimed the ugly creature with fiendish glee. "Out a-lookin' for food an' here I find it in my own home—

an' 'nough fer a whole week! I say, lasses," continued the hag rolling up her ragged sleeves, "didn't know old Tag lives here, did ye? Didn't know that she loves children; that she's so fond of 'em that she eats 'em!"

Ruth and Ruby stood speechless with terror. The hag continued: "I hev a big kettle to boil ye in, an' when nicely cooked I'm sure ye'll be delicious eatin'! I'm what the books call a cannibal!"

Suddenly she rushed upon the girls, catching them, and taking one under each arm she bore them up a second stairway that led to a third apartment high in the body of the tree.

It was a rude stairway, narrow and dark, and it seemed a long one, for the hag carried her prisoners heads down, as a thoughtless man sometimes carries his Thanksgiving turkey. If they screamed or made attempt to kick away they got extra hard squeezing for their pains.

After great effort the hag reached the floor of the last apartment. Giving each of the girls a spiteful shaking and an extra squeezing, she set them down on the floor, at the same time warning them to have good behavior, under penalty of extra punishment.

The hag seated herself on a rude seat to rest. The weight of her prisoners had wearied her and she was angry. She felt that she owed them the cruel treat-

ment she was giving them. Aided by the light of a fire that burned on the flagstone hearth in a corner, the girls obtained a view of their captor's face. Not in all the pictured pages of their story books had they seen a face that would equal hers.

The brawny, half naked arms had scanty resemblance to flesh and blood limbs. The fingers were long, crooked, and extremely filthy, and the nails were sharp and thick, like those of a bear.

The hag wore a dress of hairy skins from which there came disgusting odors of grease, dirt and smoke. Her head was of enormous size, and out of proportion with her body. Her arms were lean and long, her lower limbs short and crooked, her feet ill-shaped and large. Apparently, her stature was seven feet, but had she stood erect another foot would have to be added to her height.

It was punishment in itself merely to have to gaze on so horrible a form, but the cousins, completely overcome by fear, were quite unable to remove their eyes from the red eyes that gazed on them with wicked delight. Not until the hag rose to walk over to the fire had they even dared to glance over the room.

Over the fire hung a large kettle filled with water. In the ashes that lay on the flagstones were bits of charred bones and a few buttons. Quite near them sat

a pitcher on a greasy block ; also, an ugly knife, a whetstone and a few other articles. In an opposite corner they discovered a couch of rags and skins, and beside them, against the wall, stood a large chest that resembled a refrigerator.

On a nail above their heads hung a pair of short dresses. Were they the clothes of the hag's children, or—the thought came simultaneously to the cousins—were they the apparel of unfortunates like themselves that had wandered into the place?

To get relief from a cramp Ruth shifted her position. Old Tag hearing her, turned on her with angry eyes. "Don't ye dare leave that spot !" she growled. "If you try to escape I'll catch you an' treat you to a drink o' boilin' water !" Then, resuming her seat on the block she began to torment her captives by telling her wicked plans and by asking unanswerable questions. "I'm a-going to chew ye up, my dears," she resumed, grinning hideously ; "I havn't had a bite o' human flesh fer more'n a week, but—pointing to the dresses hanging on the wall—"the last I had was sweet as quail, an' tender, too, fer they were young, like yerselves."

The hearts of the cousins grew cold with fear, as if ice filled their breasts. They trembled visibly but dared not to move.

"Where are ye from?" demanded old Tag, picking

her ugly teeth with a splinter that she split off the block with her thumb nail.

The girls hesitated to speak.

"Speak, ye brats, or I'll cut off yer noses! It's a way I have o' makin' the dumb speak."

"We—we—are from the—the earth," stammered Ruth, shrinking from the hag's withering gaze.

"Liar!"—the hag loudly screamed—"yer not from out the earth, fer yer hands an' face are too clean fer ye to belong to the filthy folks that lives in the caves!"

"I mean that we are from the planet earth, up in the sky."

"None o' yer nonsense, lass! There's no earth in the sky. The earth—ground, I call it—is below fer us to walk on, an' the sky is above fer us to look at. Ye are not so foolish as ye pretends to be!"

It became evident to the cousins that old Tag had a very limited knowledge of science, and they felt little hope of being able to make her understand their words.

"How old are ye?" was the next question.

"We are of the same age," replied Ruth. "We are fifteen."

"Another lie!" roared the hag, snatching up a stick that lay at her feet. "Yer not hardly the half o' it! Ye can't deceive me! Old Tag's an ugly hag, but she's no fool!"

The girls saw the hag's anger was rising, but they did not know what to do. Of course they were not acquainted with the fact that fifteen years in Mars almost equals twenty-four of the earth's years, the Martian year being composed of six hundred and eighty-seven days, instead of three hundred and sixty-five days, as is the case on the earth. It is little wonder then that the hag believed the girls to be liars, since they did not appear to be more than seven years old, according to the hag's reckoning.

"How much do you weigh?" The hag turned her eyes on Ruby. "You answer this time," she growled; "perhaps you'll tell the truth."

"We weigh nearly the same—one hundred pounds each," answered Ruby, promptly.

A gleam of sudden anger appeared in old Tag's eye, and she leaped to seize a butcher knife that lay on a block near at hand. "I'll teach ye not to sit there lying!" she roared, advancing on the girls, knife in hand.

"Spare us, good woman!" pleaded Ruby, with white face.

"Don't call me 'good'; I'm wicked, an' so are ye, fer ye'r liars! Ye'r not a hundred pounds, nor th' half; ye can't fool me, I tell ye!"

As there is a difference in the length of the year of Mars and the earth, so, also, is there a difference in the

weight of objects in the two worlds. But Ruby being unacquainted with the fact, was unable to reason with the hag to clear herself of the charge made against her.

The hag appeared greatly irritated because, as she supposed, her captives had attempted to deceive her. "Ye'r both liars!" roared she, quivering with rage, "an' I'll listen to ye no more. I'm gettin' hungry anyway." Grinning in their frightened faces she continued,— "Ye'r both good lookin' lasses, plump as plovers, an' there's plenty o' soup in yer bones to be boiled out; but I hardly know which o' ye to take first!"

Old Tag bent her face so near that the girls felt the heat of her foul breath, and the odor of her rags almost made them sick. Stooping, she caught Ruby's arm. "Come, dearie," she said, "I'll give to you th' honor of being my first choice!" She dragged the frightened and helpless girl to the big block, where there was standing a pitcher of wine. Ruby screamed with all her might, while Ruth endeavored to hold her back; but the hag, being very strong, dragged them both with ease.

Leaving them to lie by the block she turned to the fire to put on more fuel. Then, stepping over to the wall and reaching into a secret opening, she drew forth a wide necked bottle that contained a white powder. Setting the bottle on the table she turned to Ruby, saying—"I'll not cause you any pain, lass, while I'm cut-

ting you up fer the kittle. I have here some powder that I'll put into the wine before giving you to drink, an' in five minutes or less you'll be asleep never again to waken. If that isn't showin' you mercy, old Tag haint got none to show!"

The poor girls began to scream with all their might with the hope of attracting some rescuer to the spot; but when old Tag threatened them with the knife they instantly hushed their cries.

The hag brought from a shelf a large stone cup which she filled with wine, taking a drink herself. "I need something to stiddy my nerves," she remarked with a nod. "There's a big diff'rence in cuttin' up chickens and children. But it doesn't have to be done more'n onct a week, fer th' refrigerator keeps meat fer that length o' time."

The girls glanced with horror toward the big chest. They were about to recommence their screaming, but an ugly look from old Tag caused them to keep silence. They sat trembling, fearing even to stir. The most gloomy thoughts filled their minds, and great tears streamed down their cheeks. They had disobeyed the King of the Air by disregarding the warning printed on the wands sent them. They realized that it was their own fault that they were in trouble, and they felt that their punishment was simply just; still, they

did not relinquish hope. They secretly prayed to their angels to help them in the hour of distress, for they knew that even if one's angel has turned away from one, an earnest prayer will surely bring him back.

The hag went on with her preparations, adding fuel to the fire, testing the water with her finger, and whetting the big knife on a stone.

"Oh, Lord!" moaned Ruby, "Lord help your poor, disobedient children."

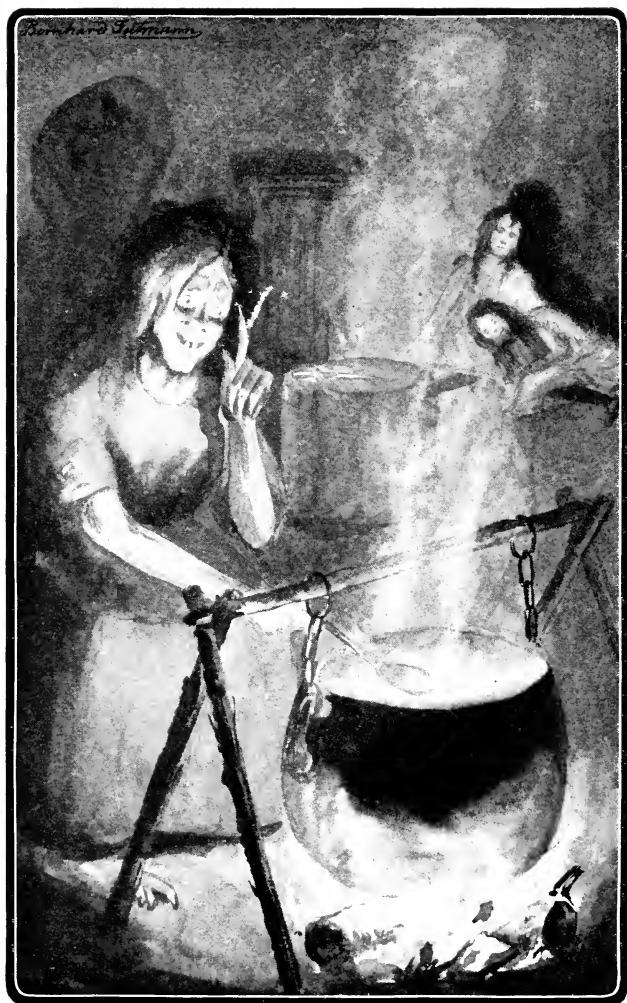
"Stop that foolish babbling!" cried old Tag, turning on the girl with flashing eye.

Ruby closed her lips, but in her heart the prayer was continued.

The hag again turned to the fire. "At last," she said to herself, "at last the water is hot! More wine for my nerves, and the work begins!"

Once more she filled the cup with wine and drank greedily. Then, refilling the cup, she removed the cork from the wide-necked bottle. Taking out a big pinch of the white powder she dropped it into the cup of wine and stirred it up with her finger. In a moment the powder had dissolved, and the potion was ready.

Old Tag caught Ruby's arm and pulled her to her feet. "Here, lassie," she said, handing the cup, "take this down—it's nice and sweet, an' in five minutes you'll be asleep an' with th' angels!"



"At last the water is hot! More wine for my nerves, and the work begins!"

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Ruby stood paralyzed with fear, her face white as snow.

"Take hold!" cried the hag, impatiently.

"Oh, no, no," cried the poor girl, falling on her knees. "Good woman, please don't—"

"Don't 'good woman' me! Didn't I tell you that I'm not good, but wicked, an' can't you see fer yerself? Come, drink that up quick, or I'll pour it down yer throat!"

Ruby remained firm, almost defiant.

"Will you obey?" Old Tag's face was aflame with rage.

"I—I cannot!"

"Then, I'll help you!"

The hag seized Ruby by the hair with one hand, holding her head well back, and with the other she placed the cup to the girl's lips. "Drink!" she commanded.

Ruby's lips were firmly closed, but the hag would not be thwarted. Prying open the clenched teeth with the cup, and forcing it between her bleeding lips, she poured the contents down the girl's throat, almost strangling her.

The drug soon had effect. Ruby closed her eyes and ceasing her struggle, fell on the floor beside the block.

Ruth could give no assistance to her cousin, but she seemed to hear an inner voice, which assured her that help was at hand.

At last, while old Tag's head was turned away for a minute, Ruth, taking advantage of the situation, reached her hand into the wide necked bottle and drew forth a big pinch of the white powder. This she cast into the wine in the pitcher, well knowing that the hag would soon take a drink. She had been none too quick, however, for in a moment the hag's eye was on her again.

Ruby lay pale and motionless, well under the influence of the drug. Ruth bending over her, was not so discouraged as she pretended to be; indeed, she was quite hopeful, for she knew that the hag would soon be taking a dose of her own medicine.

Old Tag stopped to feel the pulse of the unconscious girl. Then, nodding to Ruth, she remarked: "She's ready to be cut up. "Perhaps," she added, with a hideous grin, "perhaps you had better turn away your eyes; the scene may cause you distress!"

A moan escaped from Ruth's lips. She covered her face with her hands, leaving enough room between her fingers to peep through. Although excited, she was acting well her part.

At last old Tag took up the pitcher. "Another good drink for my nerves!" she muttered.

Had not Ruth's face been hidden by her hands, she would have betrayed her satisfaction. "I hope she will take a good swallow," thought she.

But old Tag did not drink. After smelling the wine she set the pitcher down, as if she suspected that something was wrong. Ruth's hope fled, and a cold fear came in her heart. The hope of rescue seemed lost. Oh, the agony of doubt! The torture of delay! Why did not old Tag drink—or let it alone?

Again the hag raised the pitcher, but just as she was about to put it to her lips she held it away, at the same time squinting her eye and looking into it. "There's something in it!" she muttered, setting the pitcher on the block a second time.

Ruth held her breath; her heart was leaping beyond control in her breast. "Surely," thought she, "my trick has been discovered!"

She was about to despair when the hag, reaching her long fingers into the pitcher, pulled out something which she cast upon the floor. "It's only a poor, dead beetle," she muttered, "but I want wine, not bug juice!" Then, without delay, she raised the pitcher a third time, taking a long, deep draught.

Smacking her lips and putting the pitcher away, she went and sat on the block by the fire.

One, two, three minutes passed. The hag did not rise. She had not even cast her eyes about the room. The drug had taken effect. Her head nodded, her long arms fell by her side. Finally, with a sleepy grunt, she

pitched forward, falling on the floor, where she lay helpless!

For a moment Ruth was too excited to act, but she soon recovered her presence of mind. Her quick wits did not permit her to remain idle. "It's an answer to our prayer for help," thought she, as she bent over the insensible form of her cousin in an effort to lift her.

Ruby's death-like appearance gave a shock to Ruth. Had assistance come too late? Impossible that death should come when deliverance was at hand!

When Ruth kissed her cousin's cheek she found it warm, and when she placed her hand over the heart she felt it beat.

Twining her arms around the body of her cousin, Ruth lifted her and bore her to the stairway. There she lay down her precious burden for a little rest. Just then she heard a heavy groan from old Tag, who began to roll about on the floor. Ruby's wand lay near the hag, and unless quickly recovered, her body would roll upon it.

The precious rod had to be recovered, so Ruth sprang forward to pick it up; but old Tag with another groan, rolled on it just as the poor girl reached to pick it up!

A cry of disappointment escaped from Ruth's lips; but she realized that there was still left a hope, and that there was no time to be lost. No doubt old Tag would

soon recover her senses, for the overdose made her sick, and she would soon disgorge all. If the girls should again fall into her power—what then?

Ruth seized the hag's long arm, and attempted to draw the body aside, but she might as well have drawn at the carcass of a cow! She felt the temptation of despair. Tears came to her eyes, but she dashed them away. Claspings her hands above her head, turning her face heavenward, she began another prayer for help.

At that moment something fell from her belt and struck the floor with a loud rap. It was her own wand, which she always carried in her belt. In her excitement she had forgotten it. "Heaven be praised for reminding me!" she muttered. Then quickly snatching up the gold rod, she thrust it under the hag's body until it came in contact with Ruby's wand. By power of attraction the rods clung together, and were withdrawn.

Having recovered the treasure, Ruth returned to the rescue of her cousin. Again taking the unconscious girl in her arms, Ruth proceeded to bear her down the dark stairway. It was no light task to support the senseless body, but Ruth had plenty of pluck. "It's lucky for me," she thought, "that my way lies down stairs, not up."

Without much difficulty she reached the foot of the stairs. There she paused for a moment's rest before

descending the next stairway. The time of her rest was brief. She heard a noise from the room above her. Whether it was a groan, a kick or a step, she could not decide. Again she took up her burden and began the descent of the last stairway. After considerable effort she reached the bottom, where the fresh air and the sunshine gave her new strength and courage. She was so anxious to complete her task of love that she did not lose a moment.

Ruby lay on the grass near the tree. The bloom returned to her cheeks, and the crimson to her lips; but her eyes remained closed.

Ruth took from her belt the golden cloth. In an instant it had the form of a chariot, and was ready for use.

"Beauty, Bright!" In the twinkling of an eye the little ponies had returned from their pasture of sunlight. They stood ready for duty.

One more task and all would be well. Ruth lifted the insensible form of her cousin into the car; then, as she gave the word to the ponies, casting a glance over her shoulder she saw old Tag staggering about, tearing her hair and uttering loud cries of despair.

But the chariot and its passengers were off like a flash of light.

CHAPTER V.

MR. JACK FROST.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent traveling in the car without incident worthy of mention. When evening came, the cousins ate supper in a small meadow near a great wood. The food was, as before, furnished by the magic power of the wands.

After the meal the girls strolled through the meadow, chatting and singing merrily, until the wings of night began to spread over the drowsy world.

With their ever useful rods they prepared for themselves a resting place for the night. They drew a circle on the grass, and immediately a little white tent spread itself over them, hiding them securely from the outside world.

The tent was filled with soft, white light, although there was no lamp visible. All without was quite dark.

Having said their night prayers, the cousins lay down to sleep on a snow-white bed, with a wreath of roses on each bed post. Their rest was sweet. Not even the disappointed hag came in a dream to them, for all except sweet dreams had been locked out.

Having eaten breakfast long before sunrise, the girls were on their way to visit Mr. Jack Frost in his laboratory in a cave under a hill only a mile from the meadow.

One would scarcely expect to find in a cave so skilled an artist as Jack Frost; yet it is there that he spends the greater part of his life. He does not live alone, however, for there are a great many Frosts living in the same cave, all of them being children of Nature's great ice artist. Like Mr. Frost himself, they are all industrious, having been taught early in youth to draw and paint in ice. They are designers, paint mixers, brush makers, waiters. The female Frosts do the designing and mixing, while their hardy brothers go out to decorate the cold world with the prepared designs. They are sent out every night into different parts of the world, but they always return before midnight, as their work is usually done in a few hours.

Mr. Frost does most of the difficult work himself, besides overseeing the work of his artists. Quite frequently he remains out until sunrise. Occasionally, when he does not return by seven or eight o'clock, Mrs. Frost finds herself worrying about his delay, for on one such occasion he came home sick, the result of partial sunstroke.

After breakfast each morning Mr. Frost inspects all the new designs made by his daughters during the night. For those who have done good work there are suitable rewards, and for those whose work is unsatisfactory there awaits—punishment? Oh, no; not even a

scolding, for Mr. Frost is kind and considerate. It is encouragement that awaits those that have succeeded in doing only indifferent work, and it is wonderful what an amount of really good work eventually grows out of indifferent skill, when such encouragement is given.

The sun was just rising when Ruth and Ruby entered the door of the cave. At first all within was dark, but presently straying rays of light appeared.

The girls found themselves in a long hallway, at the end of which was a closed door. Three distinct raps made on the panel by the little white knuckles of Ruth's trembling hand brought a response from within. The great door opened quickly, and a flood of bright light poured into the hallway.

A sweet little girl in snowy robes stood before them. Her face was tender white, but her cheeks and lips were red and pink. Her eyes were cold blue, but strangely bright. On her head rested a cap with frost plumes. Long, silken tresses fell upon her shoulders, and as she advanced, her icy slippers clicked on the stone steps.

One delicate hand nervously toyed with the rustling folds of her robe, while the other held open the door to the visitors. "Be pleased to step in," said she with a graceful bow.

Ruth and Ruby were greatly surprised on meeting there this sweet and beautiful girl, and perhaps, in their surprise, they hesitated too long before speaking.

"We should like to see Mr. Frost, if you please," said Ruth, with some excitement.

"Kindly follow!" The little maid led the way, gliding ahead, her snowy garment filling the chamber with the sound of its rustling. The girls followed through many doors and chambers, until they came at last to a great icy door.

On the door, and at each side, hung sketches in frost-work—a city, a wood, a lake, a garden, a waterfall and a mountain scene. Above the door in solid crystal frame, written in fancy letters, was the word "WELCOME."

The door was opened by the maid, who passed in, followed by our friends. The new chamber was well lighted and magnificently decorated. The furniture was made of clearest ice, cold but comfortable appearing. The windows were draped with snowy curtains, and decorations of the same delicate material hung on walls and furniture. Chandeliers ornamented with ice-prisms hung from the high ceiling, which was decorated with feathered frost work, delicately tinted. Two large mirrors made of purest ice and set in marble frames hung on the wall, and a huge center table, carved and cut from a solid block of agate, graced the more than beautiful room.

The frost-maiden, having seated the visitors, sent to

Mr. Frost the announcement of their arrival by pulling a small cord that was near at hand.

All was quiet for a moment. The visitors allowed their eyes to roam about the magnificent apartment. They saw much that was worthy of admiration; but it was the little maid who stood in the door in her snowy robe, in cap with frost plumes, and in dainty slippers of ice, that claimed most of their attention.

Footsteps were heard. The door opened and Mr. Frost entered. "The ladies asked to see you," said the little maid to her father. Then, with a bow to our friends, she disappeared.

Mr. Frost advanced, with a smile on his honest face. The cousins rose to meet him, but he motioned them to their seats.

"Ladies, you need not introduce yourselves," said the man of ice, with a kind smile, "for I am well acquainted with you."

This announcement was, of course, a surprise to the girls, but they re-occupied their seats and Mr. Frost continued:

"I distinctly remember"—the thought gave him pleasure, for he smiled in good humor—"I distinctly remember the cold winter night that I first met you. It was about a year and a half ago, when I was visiting my cousin Jack Frost, with whom you are so well ac-

quainted. We were riding in my cousin's best sleigh when we met you in the road on your way to an entertainment at the school house. 'Now,' said my cousin, as we approached in the invisible sleigh, 'here are two sweet little girls that are always so warmly clad that I never have been able to get more than a small nip at their fingers or toes. Catch them if you can; see if you can touch their soft cheeks.'

"I sprang from the sleigh and caught you fast—one in each arm; but you scarcely felt my cold embrace. I pressed my lips to your cheeks, kissing them until they grew red, and by way of protesting you laid your warm fur against your face, and hastened along with your heads down, as if you were ashamed of having received a kiss from me! I remembered your faces the moment my eyes rested on you!" He then shook the hands of his visitors, and made them both welcome. "I am more than pleased to have you visit with us!" he declared. "I am delighted!" and he sank into the snowy folds of a rocker, with a happy smile on his face.

The cousins scarcely could find words to make reply to the kind greeting of Mr. Frost. Ruth was first to speak. "It is a real pleasure to meet so great an artist as the world recognizes you to be, Mr. Frost, and we consider ourselves greatly honored."

"Oh, I'm a common old chap," declared Mr. Frost;

"but a number of people admire my work, which is all there is to admire, for the designs come from the Master Artist."

"But you make designs of your own, do you not, Mr. Frost?" ventured Ruby, who thought best not to permit her cousin to do all the talking.

"All designs were made in the beginning. Properly, what is now called designing is but the discovering of designs already made. I do little designing or painting. I leave that work to my children, contenting myself by overseeing it. But"—rising from his chair and stepping to the door that led to another chamber—"you shall see for yourselves. Follow me!"

Ruth and Ruby followed Mr. Frost through a long and narrow hallway that led into a large chamber, where all was brilliantly illuminated by jets of natural gas.

At a large table before a mirror sat a dozen boys, and the same number of girls. The light-haired, blue eyed girls in frost-dresses sat on one side of the table, while at the other side sat the boys in dress of blue. All were busy—the girls with their designs, the boys with their painting.

Leaving his visitors seated near the end of the long table, Mr. Frost went to speak to one of his daughters. He whispered a short sentence to her. The girl raised

her eyes for a single glance at the cousins ; then her designing pencil went to work. Very soon she handed a sketch that she had made on a plate of glass to one of her brothers to be finished. The boy went to work industriously, and in a short time his painting was done. It was taken to Mr. Frost for his inspection. Mr. Frost seemed pleased, and without delay he handed the plate to Ruby, saying :

“Be so kind as to accept from Jack Frost this little token of his friendship !”

Ruby accepted the plate with thanks. A pleasant smile crept over her pretty face when her eyes fell upon the work ; and as for Ruth, a look of glad surprise captured every feature of her queenly face that same instant.

Mr. Frost, noting all this, indulged in a beaming smile of his own. He felt that he had pleased his visitors.

What was the sketch on the glass that caused Ruby’s smile and Ruth’s surprise ? It was a photo-sketch of themselves, done in ice, on a plate of glass ! It was better than good ; it was almost perfect. Ruby with her light brown hair dressed back from her fair forehead, a loveliness glowing in her large eyes, pink blooming in her cheeks, and the tint of coral showing on her lips, appeared fresh and sweet. Ruth’s likeness was accu-

rate. The artist had caught the fresh bloom of her cheeks, the crimson of her lips, the gentle expression of her eyes, and the radiance of her smile.

The cousins were extravagant in their praise of the work, and it is certain that Mr. Frost was more than pleased to have his visitors praise and admire the work of his artists.

Mr. Frost set before his visitors a jar of frost-paint, such as children scrape from window panes in winter time. "There," said he, with a frosty twinkle in his blue eye, "how would you like to eat some of that?"

"I have eaten frost many a time," said Ruth. "I have taken it off window panes, off fences, and have found it in many other places. I like it better than ordinary ice."

"But I suppose you never have tasted it from the jar, and if you have not, here's a whole jarful for you—help yourselves!" He uncovered the jar for them, while one of his daughters brought crystal dishes and a pair of gold spoons.

"Thank you, sir," said Ruth, with true gratitude; "but it is scarcely right for us to eat your paint!"

"Why, so, if you like it?"—Mr. Frost opened his eyes, wrinkled his face and twisted his lips in comical fashion—"It is not scarce with me, for I have millions of pounds of it in my store rooms. Come, let me see you help yourselves!"

Our friends could not decline the kind invitation, so they dipped their spoons into the jar, each taking a small amount of the ice paint in her dish. It was found to be delicious as the frost they had been used to, and in good time the dishes were emptied. The girls were satisfied, and Mr. Frost was well pleased.

Mr. Frost led his visitors into an adjoining room to show them his store of ice paint. On seeing the immense quantity of the precious material, the thought came to Ruby that she would like to take home with her about a dozen of the jars. But this selfish thought was driven from her mind, and there came another that was unselfish. She felt that they were taking up too much of Mr. Frost's time.

"Mr. Frost," she said, rising, "I fear we are taking up too much of your valuable time!"

"Oh, don't say that!" protested the great ice artist. "I have plenty of time. I wish to show you everything. It is not often I receive a visit from the earth's people, and I'm determined to entertain them when they do come to visit me. I am well aware of the fact that girls are fond of skating," continued Mr. Frost, smiling pleasantly; "therefore I'll take great pleasure in showing you to our skating pond, where my family shall join us for a good time. I'm not too old to enjoy skating. My hair is white, but my heart is young and my

limbs are still supple!" Turning to his children, he said: "Children, you may take an hour for skating. Prepare to join us at the pond."

There was a moment of hustling and rustling to get caps and wraps and skates, after which the children withdrew to another room.

Mrs. Frost appeared, and was introduced to our friends, who took an instant liking to her, for she was a sweet old lady.

After a time spent in conversation, the start for the pond was made. Mr. Frost, with Ruth for his partner, led the way, and was followed by Mrs. Frost and Ruby.

Many chambers, all well furnished and decorated, were passed through, and in due time the skating pond was reached. The place was aflame with lights, whose dazzling rays were reflected from a great sheet of ice that was many acres in extent. It was one of the very largest halls in all that many chambered cave, and in it were many wonderful and beautiful things.

There were gigantic marble pillars supporting the high dome; curtains of moss and veils of frost; statues of snow and mirrors of ice. There were galleries, stairways, arches, doors and windows; but there were no stoves—not even a fire kindled on the ice to warm their feet!

The Frosts had arrived. Mr. Frost presented the cousins with silver skates, strapping them on with his own hands to guard against possibility of accident.

When all was ready Mr. Frost, with Ruth for his partner, led the way across the ice. Following came Mrs. Frost and Ruby and the Frost children—boys and girls in couples.

Three times around the dizzy course they whirled with increasing speed, and soon the cave was filled with ringing echoes of laughter and the wild shouts of the merry party.

At first the dancing lights were dazzling to the eye. The girls were unable to see where they were going, but they clung trustingly to their partners' arms, enjoying a sense of calm security.

After a few rounds Mr. and Mrs. Frost surrendered Ruth and Ruby to two of the oldest sons, who took the girls and went flying with them over the glittering course. The boys had no stiff joints to interfere with their movements. They were active, graceful, gay; and when they got in motion they dashed on as if they had wings on their heels! It seemed as if the circuit had been made in an instant. The boys, of course, were highly pleased with their partners, as well as the sport. Like most boys, they enjoy skating with their sisters; but find a little more enjoyment skating with the sisters of other boys.

Each new round the cousins were given new partners, until all of Mr. Frost's boys had the honor of skating with them. Then came the girls for their turn, and when Ruth and Ruby had done a round with each, they felt that they soon must have a rest.

And the rest came. With weary limbs and contented hearts they left the ice. Mr. and Mrs. Frost led the way to the dining room, where a warm breakfast awaited them. Mr. Frost called it a luncheon, but it was eaten like a breakfast, and it tasted like one. For the cousins, there were cups of steaming tea, warm biscuit with butter, fruits, cakes and pies. The members of the family ate nothing that was warm, for they are used to cold victuals—fruits frozen, sifted snow, crushed ice, ice water and icicles dipped in honey. It is scarcely necessary to state that Ruth and Ruby enjoyed the meal, even if it had been the second one of the morning, for, as every one knows, skating makes one hungry, and when one is hungry, one thoroughly enjoys one's meal.

From the dining room the cousins were taken into the family parlor, which was, of course, the most beautiful, as well as the best furnished of the many rooms of that great cave.

The high alabaster walls were covered with ice-paintings. There were portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Frost

and their children, pictures of mermaids, nymphs, fairies and angels; there were drawings of birds, beasts, insects—all done in ice, with superior artistic skill.

Mrs. Frost took great pleasure in exhibiting some frost-laces that had been made with her own hands, and they were worked in the most delicate and beautiful patterns.

The Frost girls opened their elegant wardrobes, displaying to the admiring eyes of their visitors a pleasing array of fine apparel, equal in beauty and value to that of the richest fairy queen. But it was not until the jewel casket was opened that the cousins found it necessary to make a special effort to curb curiosity, and restrain hands that were anxious to handle the delicate trinkets. These valuables appeared delicate as frost work—almost too fine for the touch of flesh and blood beings. Therefore, Ruth and her cousin felt obliged to fast with their hands while feasting with their eyes!

In another part of the room the boys were adjusting an optical instrument for viewing frost crystals and pictures in lace curtains made by their mother. Behind the curtain a brilliant light was placed, so that each thread and fibre was brilliantly illuminated.

The instrument was brought to the cousins, that they might view the work in its minutest details. When they took their seats at the instrument they discovered

that it was an improved stereoscope, four feet in length, of long focus and good definition, the lenses being made of the purest ice.

The first peep through the wonderful glasses brought forth from the girls exclamations of happy surprise, for the ice crystals in the texture of the curtain were revealed with wonderful distinctness, and as their size was increased, their beauty grew proportionately. There were wheels, circles, triangles, squares, prisms, cylinders, globes and hemispheres; there were swords, shields, shells; there were leaves and grasses, buds and blossoms, faces and forms, houses, castles, mountains, fountains, waterfalls, and many other things without name or number.

The cousins would have asked no greater pleasure than that of viewing the scenes for another half hour; but they were neither forgetful nor selfish. They remembered that Mr. Frost and his entire family had abandoned their work to entertain them, and they realized that the time of a busy family must not be wasted with impunity; so they at once concluded to thank Mr. Frost for their entertainment and go on their way.

Ruth, who was a month the older, addressed their thanks to Mr. Frost. "We have had a most pleasant visit," she said, "and shall not take up any more of your valuable time. So, Mr. Frost, you will please accept

our hearty thanks for the pleasant time we have enjoyed here."

The great ice artist ran his fingers through his snowy locks. "I'm sorry to see you go," he said, with genuine regret; "but I hope we'll see you again, and very soon at that!"

"We should be pleased to call again, and shall do so if we have an opportunity."

"Very well, then; I'll send for the maid. But, should I not have the good fortune to meet you again, may I ask you kindly to take my love and the love of Mrs. Frost and the boys and girls, to my cousin Jack, his wife and their boys and girls, when you return to your home?"

"We shall be glad to bear any message you may wish to send!"

"Then take our love! Good bye, dear friends!"

Mr. Frost rang a bell, and in a moment the little maid whom they had met at the entrance of the cave, stood before them. "Please follow," she said, in kindest, sweetest tones.

Ruth and Ruby, led by the maid, passed through all the great doors once more. When at last the entrance was reached, the maid bade them good bye and disappeared.

The cousins were once more in the sunshine. They

had brought with them the ice-portrait of themselves, which they paused to re-examine. But they discovered to their sorrow that it faded quickly—melted away—for the warm rays of the sun dissolved the ice-paint, and in a few minutes the glass on which the painting had been done was clear, and only a few drops of water remained.

The beautiful portrait had melted away like a face in a vision, and in the cousins' cup of gladness was a drop of sadness.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FALLING ANGEL.

It came the morning of the third day in Mars. After a hearty breakfast, eaten on the prairie, the cousins resumed their journey of exploration on foot. The beauty of the morning filled their hearts with that yearning desire that comes to light hearts to rise above their prosy surroundings, as the lark soars from earth to heaven.

Great white clouds—ships on the celestial sea—floated over their heads, and it seemed that their passengers were waving signals down to them, inviting them aloft to ride with them.

"Let us go up to the clouds!" proposed Ruby, gazing with wistful eyes at the vapory ships that floated far above.

"Get your mirror," said Ruth, accepting the proposition, "reflect a light ray, and I will catch it with my wand!"

Ruby produced a small mirror, and with its aid a ray was reflected up to one of the largest of the clouds. Ruth stretched forth her wand and the ray became a captive. It was strong enough to bear the weight of the two, and there was plenty of room, for it was an inch thick and a foot wide. One could not have distinguish it from a new pine plank.

Seated on the ray, the girls rose to the clouds. Away the horizon swept, like a curtain drawn by an invisible hand, revealing mile after mile of the fairest country that ever pleased the eye, or gladdened the heart of a traveler.

Rivers crossing ruddy plains, dwindled to silver threads in the hazy distance. Forests lost their delicate tints in the deeper hues of the plain; lakes lay like mirrors over by the far horizon; fair cities dotted the hills, and busy trains hurried over narrowing rails that led them on and on out of sight behind the blue curtains of the sky.

As they neared the great cloud they felt the breath of the breeze that wafted it along. How grand its appearance! How majestic its motion!

When the girls set foot on the vapory mass it seemed

to sway in the breeze, as if it were about to be overturned by their weight; but when they sat down on the snowy folds, the swaying motion ceased. They bared their heads to the breeze. How cool and pleasant! The air was fresh and sweet with heavenly perfumes. Silently, like a fairy craft, the cloud bore its passengers over the waves of the aerial ocean; but the breeze was light, and their progress slow.

What if another cloud should meet and strike their own? Would there be a shock to throw them off? Could they catch a ray of light in time to save themselves from falling?

The wind changed and blew stronger, causing the clouds to toss and plunge threateningly. One of the vapory crafts was seen to approach, urged on by the wind, and it seemed as if the cousins would be crushed or cast overboard. Their faces, red with excitement and pleasure a moment before, became white with fear.

"Catch a ray of light, Ruby!" Ruth was greatly excited.

"I have one ready," said Ruby, who was more calm than her cousin; "where shall we go?"

"To another cloud!"

"The one nearest?"

"Yes."

The cloud sailed proudly on, as if it were the flag-

ship of the fleet. It was within a few hundred feet of them when Ruth, filled with sudden alarm, cried out—

“Let us go! Let us go at once!”

“Let us remain,” suggested Ruby, whose fear had fled.

“We shall not be harmed. I’m certain there will be no danger!”

“But cousin, the shock may throw us off—and then—.” There was no color in Ruth’s face. She was thinking of the accident that happened to Ruby when they met the comet.

“No fear of a shock,” laughed Ruby. “The folds are quite soft, and will come together like balls of cotton. Let us remain, that we may feel how softly they come together.”

“Oh, no, Ruby, we should be thrown off and killed!”

“If necessary we could sit down and let the clouds come bumping. It would be great fun!”

“But we must look to our safety. We could witness the meeting at a safe distance.”

“We could not feel the effect!”

Ruth’s face was pale, and her actions betrayed great anxiety, for she was beginning to fear that her cousin’s curiosity would expose them to great danger. “Dear Ruby,” she pleaded, “we certainly shall be hurt, or perhaps killed. Will you not consent to leave this place of

danger? I will not go alone and leave you here, so please come!" She took her cousin in her arms and kissed her, well knowing that that would add force to her pleading. And it did so. Ruby smiled, returned her cousin's kiss, and immediately consented.

The approaching cloud was within a few yards of them. Quickly seating themselves on a ray of light, they rode away to another cloud, where they seated themselves to witness the meeting of the vapory crafts.

Ruby's curiosity had not deserted her. She was determined to experience the sensation of being shook up when the clouds should come together, and a plan to succeed was soon formed in her mind. Unnoticed by her cousin, whose interest was centered in the clouds, she stepped aside. With her mirror she caught a ray of light, and on it rode back to the cloud that they had deserted, arriving just a minute before the collision.

"Ruby! Ruby!" called Ruth after her, "Come back! for God's sake come back!"

But Ruby's face was bright with a smile. "I'm safe!" she cried.

"Heaven preserve you! Sit down—hold to the folds!"

Ruby had felt no alarm. She smiled and waved to her cousin. There would be no shock, she said, and she did not expect that there would be any.

The great mass of clouds swept nearer, its snowy folds curling in a stiff breeze that carried it along. On its near approach it appeared not only very large, but also quite ugly, and at last Ruby saw the danger, and began to fear it. The color left her cheeks, the smile deserted her lips, and in her heart she felt a distressing weakness. When she tried to speak her voice failed.

Nearer came the great mass of vapor, moving silently, but majestically. Only a few feet of space remained between the clouds. Ruby's frightened gaze fell upon the fields beneath her. The hills appeared to be running away from the scene, as if unwilling to become witnesses of the dreadful thing that was about to happen, and the trees in the forest seemed to be in a whirl of excitement from the same cause.

Though greatly excited, Ruby noticed a small cloud that floated far below her, as if it had been sent there for her rescue. She knelt with her white face, and prayed with hands clasped over her heart. Her eyes were on the approaching cloud, which was scarcely ten feet distant. Already she had felt on her brow the breeze that bore it on; but she did not hear the voice of Ruth calling to her, for the wind made much noise and confusion.

At last the clouds came together! The wind accompanying the greater craft caught the sails of Ruby's

ship and swept it from under her feet in an instant. She plunged groundward, head first. Her arms reached out like wings, and her long hair streamed up in the rushing air. To Ruth she appeared like an angel falling from paradise!

Without receiving the slightest injury, Ruby fell on the little cloud that she had seen passing beneath her. She sank deep in its folds, but soon was on her feet, and there was a smile of triumph on her face as she waved her hand up to her frightened cousin.

Ruth, wild with joy on discovering that her cousin was unhurt, was anxious to be with her.

"Jump down when your cloud passes over!" cried Ruby, with much enthusiasm.

"I'm coming," answered the girl above, and a moment later there appeared to be another angel falling from paradise.

Ruth threw her arms about her cousin's neck, kissing her affectionately. "Sweet cousin," she exclaimed, "I feared that you would fall to the ground and be—oh, dear—but here you are, safe in my arms!"

In a short time the girls had recovered from the excitement caused by the accident, and as they sat on the snowy folds of the cloud, they bared their heads to the breeze, and amused themselves by counting the ships of the aerial fleet that passed over them.

While Ruby was counting the ships, she thought of her wand, and on searching her belt, she discovered that the precious rod was missing.

"My wand!" cried Ruby, despairingly. "I do not remember whether or not I placed it in my belt. I may have lost it on the cloud."

"We must recover it," declared her cousin. "We cannot afford to lose it."

Without the loss of a moment Ruth had ready a ray of light, and the cousins ascended to the cloud that was bearing away the precious wand. As they drew near Ruby saw the rod, but it was tossing about, threatening to fall off.

Ruby could not afford to lose this valuable article, for much of her happiness depended on her keeping it in her possession. If it should fall into the waters of the lake below, how should they recover it?

The girls were less than ten feet away when the cloud dipped on its heavy side, and the wand slipped off. Like a golden arrow it descended, and disappeared in the deep water of the lake.

With blanched cheeks and colorless lips Ruby stepped from the ray to the cloud. Then, falling on her knees she cried with a sorely wounded heart.

Ruth endeavored to console her cousin, but it became a hopeless task. Kind words and sweet kisses were of

no avail, and Ruth herself fell to weeping. Poor, unhappy cousins! The old truth in a new form had appeared to them. There is no joy without sorrow: the thorn hides itself in the shadow of the rose.

While the girls shed their tears the cloud bore them on until at last they found themselves many miles from the lake which was then visible on the far horizon.

It is small wonder that our friends grieved, for they realized that their loss was a serious one. True, Ruths' wand remained to serve her in her need, but Ruby would find it valueless. The rod had power only in its owner's hand.

How unfortunate! Had it fallen on land it could have been recovered; but, as it happened, it had fallen into the lake, where it would lie buried—perhaps forever.

The cousins entertained the gloomiest thoughts, and shed many bitter tears as they sat on the cloud that bright, but unhappy day. Ruby would be deprived of a fine dinner, such as her wand had been furnishing, and surely Ruth would not touch the heavenly food if her cousin could not enjoy it with her.

Not so great, after all, was their loss, so far as food was concerned, for the country was blessed with an abundance of fruits; so the girls dried their eyes with smiles, resolving to keep their tears for a more appro-

priate occasion. Lively conversation was renewed, and diversion sought by leaping from cloud to cloud.

With hands joined the cousins made a daring leap to a cloud that was passing under them, falling on the soft folds and sinking out of sight. Reappearing, they then took passage on a light ray, ascending to the highest cloud in the sky. Again they joined hands, and leaped from cloud to cloud until the lowest had been reached. Many times they repeated this exercise, each time experiencing a pleasing, thrilling sensation impossible to describe. At last, becoming weary and hungry, they abandoned the fine sport and descended on a light ray to the lake shore, where they expected to find a meal of fruit and vegetables. Fruits and small berries they found in large quantities, and even vegetables—radishes, onions, tomatoes and other things that girls like to find in the garden.

While they were gathering these, a man appeared, coming out of the woods. His hair and beard were light, his step was infirm and his form was bent. His clothes were old and torn, and he talked to himself, as lonely old men often do.

As he came near, and as he raised his eyes to speak, there came a puff of wind that blew his straw hat off. The hat rolled over the grass in the direction of the lake, which was only a few yards away. The old gen-

tleman made a vain attempt to rescue his faithless straw, but it became evident to the cousins that the hat would be lost unless they immediately lent their assistance.

The race began, and great sport it proved to be. At times the hat behaved like a wayward thing, eluding the grasp when capture seemed certain, and continuing its tantalizing flight. Ruby, being the fleetest of foot, overtook the runaway straw just as it was about to tumble into the lake. The race brought a surplus of color to her cheeks, and when she handed the hat to its owner, it seemed that she was burning up with blushes.

The old man was filled with joy, not altogether on account of the recovery of the hat, but on account of the kindness shown him by strangers. He was so profuse in his thanks that Ruby became embarrassed, and to turn the tide of gratitude, she offered him a bunch of cherries, saying—

“No thanks are due us, for we have only done our plain duty. Do you like cherries?”

The old gentleman was extremely polite. He had been deeply touched at the kindly consideration of the girls. Tears of gratitude came in his eyes, as he returned thanks, and Ruby's embarrassment was increased.

Ruth, observing the embarrassment of her cousin,

entered the conversation with an offer of hospitality. "We intend to make a meal of these fruits," she said, showing the contents of a well-filled apron. "Will you sit with us and share our dinner?"

The man gladly accepted the kind invitation, and soon they were seated on the grass with a great heap of fruit before them. After a moment of conversation on ordinary subjects, the old man surprised his young friends by remarking—

"If I'm not mistaken, you are the little ladies I saw hopping about in the clouds not more than an hour ago!"

The girls blushed and looked confused. Was it hopping or leaping? Surely, to the old man they must have appeared tomboys!

"We have been in the clouds," said Ruby, smiling guiltily; "and while there we had both pleasure and misfortune."

"Sorrow and joy go hand in hand," remarked the old man. "You cannot meet the one and miss the other. But I hope your misfortune is not great?"

"I consider it great. It is nothing less than the loss of my magic wand, which fell into the lake."

"Let us hope that it is not lost. Some of the nymphs that live in the lake will find it and restore it to you."

This bright thought brought the joy of hope to the

girls' hearts. They thanked the man for his encouraging words, and felt that they could have kissed his withered cheek in token of gratitude.

They had finished their meal. The old gentleman, rising to his feet, thanked his friends for their hospitality, and said: "Since you have shown yourselves to be my friends, I think that I ought to advise you to spend the night at the humble little home of my friend, Mrs. Good, a widow, who lives in the wood only half a mile from this spot. She has living with her an only child—a daughter—and I am certain that she would be glad to accommodate you for the night. If you shall spend the night there," continued their friend, "and if you will rise early and go to the lake, you will meet there some of the nymphs, for they come every morning before sunrise to collect from the blades of grass drops of dew to make necklaces. No doubt they would be glad to meet you, and perhaps show their friendship by recovering your wand for you. Remember, now," concluded their aged friend, "go early and you shall meet the nymphs."

While the cousins were still with their eyes on the old man, he suddenly cast off his disguise. The charioteer, servant of the King of the Air, his face radiant with beauty, stood before them in his robe of white and mantle of crimson! In a second he disappeared, leaving the girls to overcome their surprise at their leisure.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent in visiting the bowers and dells of the beautiful lands that bordered the lake. In the evening the girls arrived at the widow's cottage. They were met at the door by the widow herself, a silver haired, sweet old lady, with a kind face and a friendly manner. She greeted them cheerfully, and invited them to share her supper, which her daughter was then preparing.

It was a small house of two rooms, not elegantly furnished to be sure; but the place was bright and full of cheer.

When they sat down to supper a genuine hunger was theirs, for their fruit dinner had been a good appetizer. The widow had an abundance of food, plain but wholesome, and like sensible girls, the cousins ate heartily.

The hours between supper and bed time were spent in interesting conversation. The cousins listened with genuine interest to the stories told by the old lady and her charming daughter. They were especially interested in an account that the daughter gave of a day that she had spent with the lake nymphs at the island, where she had been invited by the queen.

Ruth was an early riser, and had promised to awaken her cousin at daylight. She failed to keep her promise, however, for they had prolonged their conversation to a late hour after going to bed, and when Ruth opened her eyes, there was plenty of gray light in the little room.

The girls hastily dressed themselves and ran down to the lake shore, where they met one of the nymphs who was collecting dew drops for her necklace. Like Ruth, she was an early riser, but on that one occasion had overslept the hour.

The nymph, who bore the sweet name of Pearl, was pleased to meet the girls, and showed her friendship by greeting them with kisses. She was a lovely creature, with sweet, kindly face, large dark eyes and long dark hair. She wore a sleeveless robe of green, that was fringed with seaweed and coral. Strings of shells and precious stones hung around her white neck, and gold bracelets glittered on her slender wrists.

In the course of the conversation that followed their meeting, Ruby spoke of her lost wand, and was made happy by the announcement of its recovery.

"It was my happy lot to find it," explained Pearl, "and also my good fortune to find its owner!"

"Oh, I thank you for the good news!" cried Ruby, clasping the little water girl in her arms, and giving her a grateful kiss on her sweet, red lips.

"I found the wand at the bottom of the lake," continued Pearl, "and took it to the queen, who placed it in her treasure box to await its owner. Her majesty will be pleased to learn that the owner has been found so soon, and it is now my duty to go at once to her with the

the information. You will please wait here until I return. I shall bring either the wand, or a message from her majesty."

Without another word the sweet little creature plunged into the deep water and disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

IN NYMPH LAKE.

The cousins returned to the cottage. After a hearty breakfast they thanked the widow and her daughter for their hospitality, and Ruby, who was the keeper of the treasure, presented the old lady with a liberal gift of diamonds. The old lady's joy was so great that she burst into tears. "Bless the good Lord," she cried; "He has heard my prayer at last; He has sent me this! Blessed be His name, and may He richly reward you both, dear friends! Long have I prayed for the means and the opportunity to have my daughter educated. You have given the means, and the opportunity will come, for I can engage a teacher to come and instruct her. God bless you, friends, God bless you!" The grateful old lady kissed her benefactors, and pressed their hands, while tears of mute joy streamed from her grateful eyes.

When the cousins returned to the lake they found a small boat at the shore waiting them. In the boat were

two nymphs, Pearl and her sister Opal. The boat was as pretty a thing as one might expect to see outside Fairyland. It was a pink tinted shell, delicately fashioned, wreathed with flowers, and decorated with ribbons and bunting, and it danced on the waves like a crescent of foam.

"Come, jump in with us!" cried Pearl, with a happy smile. "You are invited by her majesty, the queen, to visit us in the island palace, and this is her boat sent for you to ride in!"

The boat drifted nearer to the grassy bank, and Pearl put out an ivory oar to steady it. The cousins stepped in and were made acquainted with Opal, who kissed and embraced them. Then the little shell-boat floated away.

It was a delightful ride over the smooth waters to the island on which the queen's palace was situated. A mile's walk separated the boat's landed passengers from the palace, but lively conversation shortened the distance by many yards.

The cousins stood before the palace door filled with admiration intermixed with wonder and surprise. The door opened and they walked in with their companions. They found themselves in a magnificent room that reminded them of Jack Frost's dwelling. The walls were highly polished, and rich decorations were everywhere.

Wreaths of natural flowers breathing out their sweet perfumes were placed here and there to catch and please the eye. Paintings rested on fancy easels, gold framed photographs hung from the walls, chandeliers of crystal and gold swung from the high ceiling, and tables and stands of agate and moss-stones occupied prominent places on the floor.

The ceiling was blue, like the sky, and was sprinkled with stars of diamonds and other precious stones, all cemented to the dome.

The floor of this magnificent apartment was covered with a carpet of grass and flowers woven new each morning by the busy fingers of the nymphs. The furniture was mahogany and rosewood, beautifully inlaid with ornamentations of gold and silver, and the high walls were graced with costly and rare work of artists that had belonged to the nymph family.

The door opened. The queen entered, met the cousins, shook hands and declared them welcome. Beatrice was her name, and she was richly dressed in the regular nymph costume—a sleeveless, trailing robe of green cloth trimmed with coral, sea-weed and strings of shells. She wore a necklace of pearls. Flowers were twined in her dark hair, and on her white forehead glittered a crescent of diamonds. On her shapely wrists she wore bracelets of threaded gold; on her slender

ankles dangled bands of silver bells and tiny shells, and on the soles of her dainty feet were fitted light sandals bound on with silk and crimson cords.

The sisters of the queen entered the room. Queen Beatrice introduced them, calling the name of each. The cousins shook hands with the nymphs, and after a few minutes of pleasant conversation, the queen appointed two of her sisters the regular companions of her visitors.

Ruth and Ruby were led into a dressing room by their companions, Pearl and Opal, and there they were attired in nymphs' dresses, having put aside their own.

Attired in their water-dresses they again met the queen, who kissed them with affection and called them her sisters. After half an hour's chat with them she sent them out with Pearl and Opal to be shown through the nymphs' chambers that were located beneath the waters of the lake. Reaching the water's edge, the nymphs took the cousins' hands in their own; then, all abreast, they dived into the water.

Slowly they sank till their feet rested on the sandy floor of a cavern in the rocks a hundred feet beneath the surface of the lake. Although far beneath the waves, the place was not dark. Phosphorescent fishes illuminated the walls and the interior with their glowing stomachs, revealing to surprised eyes many curious and wonderful things.

Transparent vines were seen clinging to snow white rocks ; millions of tiny shells lay scattered on the floor of golden sand ; colorless moss curtained rude windows ; grains of gold and precious stones imbedded in the marble walls sparkled like stars ; heaps of coral rose like monuments, and miniature forests of moss covered the cold, gray stones. There were also mounds of pearls, gardens of submarine flowers, armies of giant sponges, petrified bones and fossil remains of fish and water animals.

These were interesting sights for our friends, but there were other places of interest to be visited. Opal led the way to another cavern that was not filled with water, as was the case with the one they had visited. Instead of water, the place was filled with air, which kept the water out.

For light, Pearl set fire to the tail of an oil fish. The fish-candle fastened in a crevice in the wall poured forth a flood of light that brilliantly illuminated the entire cavern.

Marble pillars supported the sky-like dome. Semi-transparent curtains attached to dome and pillar, divided the cavern into many small rooms. By this arrangement, each nymph had a room to herself. The queen's chamber was a splendid apartment, much larger and more elegantly furnished than any other of the rooms.

Near the centre of the room stood the queen's chair, cut from a block of crystal, beautifully polished and decorated with ribbons, plumes, flowers and shells. By the door of the cavern rested a huge tank—the queen's aquarium. It really was a Nymph Lake on a small scale, for it contained representative pairs of all the creatures known to the lake. Crystal Island, with the queen's palace above and the caverns beneath the water level, was faithfully reproduced, and simply by walking round the tank the cousins saw the lake and all that was in it.

An hour was spent viewing the wonders and curiosities of this interesting chamber, and the cousins felt that they had seen all. But the greatest of many surprises awaited them.

Pearl, carrying a small key in her hand, led the girls into a side chamber where there stood a large stone chest with an iron door. The key was inserted in the lock and the heavy door opened, revealing an immense heap of treasure in gold and silver; also many precious documents. There were jeweled crowns of naiad queens, girdles of gold, sandals of silver, anklets of rare shells, wristlets of diamonds; there were chalices and goblets of gold, pitchers of pearl, plates of crystal; there were pen holders of agate, pencils of ivory, paper of silk, and books with leaves of gold bound in spider web

silk; there were timepieces of pearl no larger than a child's ring; there were—but all cannot be named, for the chest was large and well filled.

"I did not think there was so much treasure in all the world of Mars!" declared Ruth, her face beaming with pleasure. Their own little pocketful of diamonds was insignificant compared with the treasure in the chest.

"All these—I suppose they belong to your queen?" said Ruby, whose eyes were dazzled by the beauty of the things she saw in the chest.

"Oh, no, indeed!" replied Opal. "Much of the treasure belongs to her sisters. This, for instance"—picking up a pearl necklace—"this belongs to me. And this"—exhibiting a pair of gold bracelets—"is Pearl's."

One article after another was taken up and its owner's name given until at last, when interest seemed to flag, Opal, with a restrained smile, took up something, the sight of which caused Ruby's heart to leap with joy.

"My wand!" she cried, clapping her hands and dancing about.

The golden rod was laid in her eager hand, and filled with gratitude she embraced Opal and covered her face with kisses. Then, suddenly recollecting that it was Pearl who had found the wand, she ran to her to kiss and embrace her. "I had forgotten what you told me,"

she said, her face radiant with smiles, "that my wand had been placed in the queen's treasure box! You have made me so very happy!"

One of the little timepieces told them that it was noon. The queen would be expecting them up to dinner; so, leaving the cavern, they joined hands and rose to the surface of the water. They soon entered the dining room.

All were seated at a long table that was laden with a variety of wholesome foods. Ruth and Ruby were given seats near the queen, who took good care to see that all their wants were attended to.

The bread was light and sweet as snow, and there was plenty of nectar to spread upon it. There were two kinds of cake—gold and silver—but the equal of them the girls never had seen in their own world. The gold cake was alive with candies and sweet nut-kernels, and the silver cake contained raisins and berries in abundance. The superiority was not in the contents of the cakes, but in their making.

There were on the table fresh vegetables from the nymphs' garden, fruits from the orchard, nuts from the woods. There was vegetable tea for warm drink, and cold water from the crystal spring to quench the thirst; there were jellies, honies, fruit butters—in truth everything one's appetite would call for. Everything was of the best—the queen's choice.

The nymphs proved themselves merry entertainers, as well as hearty eaters. The queen setting aside her dignity, became plain Beatrice, but remained the liveliest of the group, and cheerful conversation was continued during the meal.

Dinner being over, busy hands soon had the table cleared and everything in order. Then the nymphs and their guests withdrew to the palace garden where they romped about till the queen's bell rang, calling them to the afternoon's singing, in which the queen herself joined.

After the singing, Ruth and Ruby were again sent out on the lake with their appointed companions, Pearl and Opal. The first place of interest visited was the famous whirlpool, in the centre of the lake. They entered the circling current and were drawn round and round, the circuit becoming a little smaller each revolution; also the current ran swifter as the centre was approached.

Pearl and Opal seemed thoroughly to enjoy circling round, hand in hand, but the cousins were slightly alarmed at the thought of being in what they considered a place of danger. But the whirlpool was not dangerous, for the nymphs often had passed through it going down to spend an hour in a delightful cavern called the Chamber of Rest.

They went round so swiftly that their hair was carried on the wind which whizzed by their ears almost taking their breath. Ruth and Ruby clung with firmness to the hands of their companions as they waited with half closed eyes for the trying moment to arrive.

For a second the cousins felt a thrill of terror. With frightened eyes they saw the whirl of mist and foam, and they heard the roar of the rushing wind.

The watery jaws of the roaring vortex opened, and into that hungry mouth the cousins and their companions plunged! Instantly, as if they had been so many corks, they were swallowed out of sight; and if it had not been for the skill and courage of the nymphs, this story would have to end here.

Ruth and Ruby knew no more for many moments; but the nymphs held firmly to their hands. When consciousness returned, they found themselves floating in shallow water in a cavern that must have been a thousand feet below the surface of the lake. When they opened their eyes, all was dark, but as the nymphs were clinging to their hands they knew that they were safe. They floated slowly into another current and in a moment, before they could speak, they felt themselves going over a waterfall! A thrilling, pleasing sensation came over them, lasting only a few seconds, and then they struck the water in a deep pool below.

Again they felt themselves floating. Through the shroud of darkness came to them a single ray of light through a small opening in the cavern wall. They moved in the direction of the light, swimming where the water was deep, and wading where it was shallow.

At last a pool of very deep water was reached, and the nymphs dived suddenly, taking their companions down with them. It seemed a long, deep plunge into the dark water, but presently all came up together.

What a wonderful change! The darkness was dissolved and a soft light streaming from high sky lights filled the new cavern with its rosy smile. The foul, misty air had fled with the darkness, and the cavern was a place of delight. Sweet music sent its low vibrations through the perfumed atmosphere; beds of flowers lay on grassy lawns; clear springs bubbled from the granite walls; fountains sent their misty columns high in the air only to be shattered and cast down in glittering fragments; rose gardens, proud of their blushing beauty smiled at their own reflections in the pools, and a tiny waterfall leaping over a pile of stones reduced itself to foam and mist that settled on the cold bosom of the stones.

The cousins seated themselves with the nymphs on a bed of flowers in the rose garden, where for some time they all remained in silence enjoying the sweet rest,

listening to the music and the low murmur of the waters. Opal plucked four roses from the bush that grew nearest, giving one to each of her companions and retaining one for herself. They placed the roses to their lips to kiss them and to feel the velvety folds. The effect was almost instantaneous. Ruth and Ruby, Pearl and Opal fell asleep on a bed of flowers, holding the roses to their lips. They had inhaled the somnific scent of the flowers.

They enjoyed a long sleep that was illuminated by dreams and visions so sweet and fair that mere words cannot describe them. They felt something of the peace that possesses the souls of the blessed, and they experienced a thrill of the joy that angels feel as they sweep on lightning wing through the boundless regions of heaven. They heard strains of sweet music as if coming from far away Paradise; they gazed on the naked soul of beauty which dazzled their eyes, and they tasted of the waters that flow from the eternal springs of the celestial meadow.

But the dreamers awoke, and when they opened their eyes the light had disappeared, the music had ceased and silence and darkness lay over and around them. They could not see one another's faces, but by calling and groping about they found one another and were again united with clasped hands.

In spite of the darkness the nymphs were not confused, for they were thoroughly acquainted with the place and could find their way out of the cavern as readily as children find their way to a familiar bed without the aid of match or candle. Knowing that their friends would be worrying over the prospects of delivery from the place of darkness, they began a cheerful conversation, and very soon the cousins began to take courage. They felt that they could not be lost if Pearl and Opal were left to guide them.

"Let us go to the light," said Opal, cheerfully, when it came time for the start. Claspings hands more firmly they began swimming through the deepening water.

They passed into the Hall of Cataracts, where the roaring of the tumbling waters was deafening. Tossed about on the angry waves, they found their way from chamber to chamber. At last, they felt themselves in a current that rushed in mad descent through narrow ways and winding canyons till they glided over a high waterfall into a dark, deep pool.

When they rose to the surface after the plunge, they were many yards away from the spot where they had gone down, and they found themselves again in the light. Abandoning the water, they ascended stony paths, through passes and tunnels, finally reaching a high balcony that was illuminated by many lights.

Twenty feet below them ran a swift current of water into which they must cast themselves if they would be borne to the fresh air and sunshine. The current was not only very swift, but of deep crimson hue. It seemed like folly to throw one's self into it, but, as the nymphs well knew, it was the only way out.

"If we don't fear it, why should you?" said Opal to her hesitating companion. "We have passed it safely at least a hundred times!"

Opal and Pearl were smiling, but the faces of Ruth and Ruby were pale, and their eyes were full of alarm. They trembled in every limb as they gazed around them. The great cavern walls appeared to them like the walls of a prison. Above their heads, pendent from the darkened ceiling, they distinguished great white stalactities that threatened to fall and crush them where they stood. In the twilight of a distant chamber they were able to discern ghostly forms moving about, and near them they made out huge sculptures that resembled human heads, and that cast their distorted shadows on the rough walls.

A bright flame burst from the wall sending arrows of light into the most distant retreats. As soon as the eyes of the four friends became accustomed to the strong light, everything stood revealed to them with wonderful distinctness. The beauty of the crimson

current made it seem less dangerous, the threatening stalactites were found to be firmly fastened to the dome, the ghostly forms ceased to move—for after all they were only broken pillars, and the huge sculptures were suddenly changed to rough granite boulders that had left to them not the faintest resemblance to human heads.

Pearl and Opal remembered that their companions were anxious to return to the surface of the lake. "When Opal says 'three,'" announced Pearl with a brave smile that was intended as an encouragement to the cousins, "we must jump all together into the water."

Opal holding firmly to her companions' hands, began to count—"One—two—three!" At the word all sprang into the sweeping current and were carried away in the darkness.

The descent of the current was rapid. Nothing but the continuous roar of the water could be heard. The current soon changed its course and began to flow upward, and the little divers were compelled to cling closely together to save themselves from being forced apart by the increasing force of the water. A few more seconds of doubt, a few more jerks and tosses, and they saw the light once more! They were thrown high into the air from the nozzle of a great stone tube through which the waters of the crimson current passed. They

fell back into the lake, sinking far beneath the waves ; but in a few seconds they reappeared, all happy and smiling.

They made their way to the island, a distance of a quarter of a mile, and were there met by the queen, who walked to the palace with them.

When they arrived at the palace, supper was ready, and it was astonishing how keen were the appetites of the daring four that had braved the passage of the crimson tide !

The supper dishes had been put away. The nymphs assembled in the queen's room where songs were sung and stories told, and Queen Beatrice played on her golden harp until the bright eyes of her sisters began to blink and wink and grow dim like the stars in the morning sky.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NYMPHS' PICNIC.

It was picnic day on Nymph Lake. In the morning immediately after breakfast the nymphs went ashore to sing their morning songs and to begin the picnic. The sun was well up in the sky, but it was soon hidden by a mass of dark clouds that boiled up from the horizon.

The nymphs expected a shower, but had no thought of flying from it, for nymphs and their dresses are not

harméd by the rain. Indeed, they were delighted to see the storm-cloud. The heavier the cloud the lighter their hearts, for they loved to stand in the strong, fresh breeze and catch on their tongues the first large drops that fell from the rolling clouds.

Darker grew the storm-cloud and the big drops began to fall. A chorus of joyous cries went up from the lips of the happy nymphs, but the threatening voice of the thunder silenced them, and the wind swept away their cries.

When the first blustering wind had spent its fury and passed on, the shower began in earnest. The lightning became less severe. The nymphs resumed their merry pranks, and again their joyous shouts were heard as they skipped about in the pouring rain, or stood with faces to the sky watching the rolling clouds and catching the pelting drops on their thirsty tongues.

The shower ceased and the dark clouds packed themselves in dense masses and rolled away to the horizon. The fair goddess of the rainbow came from her palace in the clouds. Standing on a vapor crag, she scattered a handful of rain drops over the sky, and a bright rainbow was formed. One end of the colored arch touched the green shore while the other end rested on the bosom of the lake.

The nymphs were well acquainted with Iris, goddess

of the bow. After each shower they waited for her to appear and scatter the drops, and they never failed to race for the beautiful prize that she always left at the foot of the bow.

"There's cousin Iris!" cried one of the nymphs the moment the goddess appeared on the crag.

"The prize! the prize!" cried the chorus of happy water-girls, leaping into the water like—frogs.

Ruth and Ruby had witnessed many races that were more or less interesting. At Fourth of July and county fairs they had seen potato races, sack races, hopping races, races after greased pigs, old men's races and even fat men's races. None of these, however, had succeeded in creating more than momentary interest; but the race of the nymphs for the rainbow prize created both interest and excitement, to say nothing of the mirth it provoked. There was tumbling, wrestling, ducking, pulling and diving. Streaks of foam on the water marked the course of the swimmers, and when the foam disappeared for a moment it signified that the nymphs were swimming under water to hide from one another, or perhaps to find a shorter course for the bow.

There were ten in the race, but only half were good swimmers. Three of the best arrived at the bow at about the same time, and there was a tremendous splashing of water in the struggle that ensued. How-

ever, it was a friendly struggle. No one became angry, or over excited, for there was no hatred or jealousy in the hearts of the queen's sisters.

The prize was won by Myrtle, a sweet young nymph who had the misfortune to be tongue-tied. "I dot 'e p'ize!" cried she, holding in her hand a fancy mirror that was set in a frame of gold. On peeping in the mirror, she saw therein the smiling face of Iris, which she kissed in token of gratitude. The image of the goddess disappeared when the glass was dipped in the water, and after that when Myrtle peeped in she saw only her own sweet face.

Ruth and Ruby and their appointed companions, Pearl and Opal, who had not taken part in the race, but who had followed at their leisure, joined the nymphs at the bow, and for the first time in their lives it was the pleasure of Ruth and Ruby to touch with their hands the real substance of the bow.

"Why is it," inquired Ruby, "that I never reached the foot of a rainbow until today?"

"You have often attempted to reach it?" said Opal with a twinkle in her brown eye.

"More than once; but each time the provoking thing moved from hill to hill, always remaining at about the same distance from me!"

"Oh!"—Opal opened wide her dark eyes, feigning

surprise, but betraying amusement. "You made a mistake in chasing the bow on land. You should have gone to the end that rested on the water!"

Ruby enjoyed the joke. "You little bit of innocent mischief!" she cried, embracing Opal and giving her a kiss.

"Up to the clouds!" cried Glory, climbing on the bow and running up to the very top of the arch. She was followed by all her companions.

When they reached the top of the many colored arch, they found that there was plenty of room to walk about and play, and although there were no banisters to make it safe, they played about and romped merrily and fearlessly.

An image of the bow was reflected from the smooth surface of the lake, and by gazing down the nymphs witnessed their own happy antics.

Tired of play they seated themselves in a row with their feet hanging over the painted side of the bow. Twelve beautiful water-girls and their fair guests seated on a rainbow, high above the waters of a lake—what a pleasing sight!

"If I on'y had win's!" lisped Myrtle, who sat near her queen, "I'd be so happy!"

"Yes," added Flora, the youngest of the girls, who sat at one end of the row playing with a handful of

shining raindrops, passing them through her rosy fingers, "if you had wings you could fly to heaven!"

"If sister had wings," came from the lips of Echo, "she could not come in the lake and swim with us. She would have to be away from us most of the time, and I am certain we should not like that!"

"And she could not race with us for the prize!" supplemented the sober minded Coral.

There was silence for a moment. The fingers of the girls were busy with the rain drops. But there was in the group one who could not keep silence for more than sixty-one seconds, unless under restraint of the queen. Since no restraining order had been issued, it is little wonder that the voice of Joy was heard. "Who'll jump down into the lake?" she asked.

"Not I!" answered a chorus of voices. Then for her punishment for having suggested so foolish a thing, she was showered with rain drops that her sisters dashed on her until she was dripping water from curly head to pearly foot.

Joy accepted her punishment with perfect resignation. Smiling through the drops of water that trickled down her face, she offered another suggestion. "Let us have a song!" she ventured.

"Yes! yes!" answered ten voices, for all the girls were in excellent spirits.

"What shall we sing?" said Beatrice.

"Let Ruth or Ruby suggest a song," said yellow haired Dawn, who had borrowed Myrtle's mirror to look at herself.

"Will you suggest one?" asked the queen, addressing Ruth. "Your cousin told me that you know a hundred songs."

Ruth blushed. "Thank you," she said; "I would choose Campbell's 'To the Rainbow.'"

"A good selection!" remarked the queen.

"Yes, oh, yes!" cried all the girls, for they liked the song.

Truly it was appropriate to the occasion. Queen Beatrice led—

Triumphal arch that fillest the sky
When storms prepare to part,
I ask not proud Philosophy
To teach me what thou art—

Still seem, as to my childhood's sight,
A midway station given
For happy spirits to alight
Betwixt the earth and heaven.

* * * * *

How glorious is thy girdle, cast
O'er mountain, tower and town,
Or mirrored in the ocean vast,
A thousand fathoms down.

For, faithful to its sacred page,
Heaven still rebuilds thy span,
Nor lets the type grow pale with age
That first spoke peace to man.

Just as the song ended, the bow began to disappear where it touched the land. Iris was there collecting the drops in her crystal jar.

The nymphs descended into the lake. Before they had reached the shore the bow had disappeared and the sky was clear once more.

One of the most interesting plants that grew on the shore of the lake was the photographic plant with its pale stem, red roots, and large, white, smooth leaves.

The nymphs, preparing to have their photographs taken, dressed themselves in robes of flowers and leaves woven together. All hands joined in the making of a flower crown for the queen. Ruth and Ruby were neatly bedecked, for the queen herself had helped make their robes. It was her ambition to have them tastily dressed that her artistic style and taste might be seen and admired by all that might chance to see the photograph.

They were all ready standing before the plant. One of the girls inclined the stem toward the sun in order that the rays of light might fall on the leaves at the proper angle.

When the photograph was made, the leaves fell off the stems. They were then collected and examined with great satisfaction. A complete group picture appeared on each leaf.

Queen Beatrice appeared thoughtful, Ruth's face exhibited slight anxiety, Ruby appeared calm, Opal was dreamy, Echo was gay, Dawn was smiling, Flora was solemn, Coral was calm, Pearl was happy, Joy was laughing, Fern held a finger to her lip, Rose was looking aside, Mist had her eyes on her queen, Bliss was looking skyward and Ray, the girl that stepped out to arrange the stem of the plant, appeared confused, for she had not had time to compose her features.

The photographs were sent to the queen's chamber for safe keeping, two having been selected and marked for the cousins.

Queen Beatrice, followed by all, retired to the shade of a beautiful grove a short distance from the shore, where a "queen of the day" was to be chosen and crowned, in accordance with an old custom practiced by the nymphs.

Beatrice removed her crown of flowers and hung it on a limb. Then she wrote on leaves the names of her twelve sisters and placed them in a little willow basket.

A blind was placed over the queen's eyes, and the names in the basket were mixed up. It was understood

that the eleventh name taken out would be the name of the new queen.

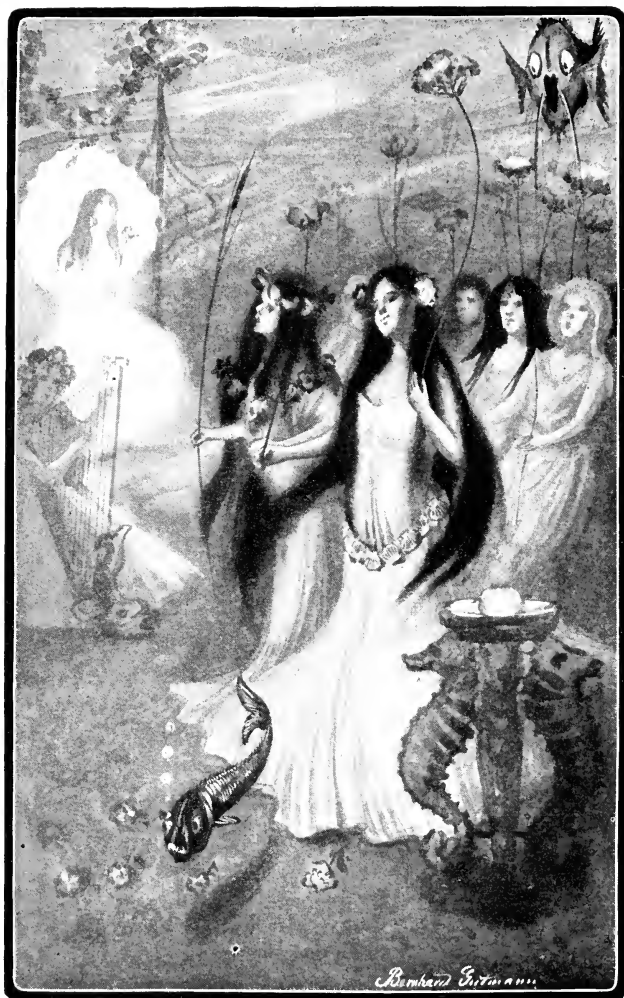
Beatrice drew the leaves out, handing them to Myrtle, who lisped them out. Flora's was the eleventh name drawn, and when Myrtle read it, all the nymphs cheered.

"Flora, I declare you queen of the day!" said Beatrice.

"Flora, queen of the day!" cried all her sisters.

The new queen was seated on a willow throne that was covered with grasses and flowers, and a sceptre—the stem of a tall prairie pink—was placed in her hand. A crown of flowers was then placed on her head and the nymphs came before her. "Health and happiness to our beloved queen!" they cried, each one coming forward with a kiss for her. Then followed the flower-dance, which lasted for a quarter of an hour. Flowers had been scattered on the ground, making a soft carpet for light feet. A flower arch had been erected over the throne, and the blossoms continually falling from it almost covered the little queen.

Near the throne sat Beatrice playing on her golden harp, while her sisters marched in couples around her and under the arch. Round and round they marched saluting their queen and smiling happily until at last the music ceased.



“Flora, I declare you queen of the day”

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Flora came smiling from her throne. Two of her sisters made a saddle of their hands and she was placed in it and carried three times round her throne, Beatrice walking ahead with her harp, all the other girls following.

After the dancing and marching the little queen was lifted with loving hands from her saddle and again took her place on the throne with her sisters seated around her.

Within a half mile of the spot where the nymphs rejoiced over the coronation of the queen of the day, in a secluded place near the shore of the lake, was a lonely grave. It was the resting place of a young girl that had joined the nymph family some years previous to the time of the cousins' visit to Mars. The girl had been bitten by a snake, and had died before medicine could be procured.

Myra—for that was the girl's name—was very dear to Flora, who was then about ten years old. Indeed, she had been in her company so much that the other members of the family complained to their queen that they had not had an opportunity to show their love for their adopted sister.

When the girl was dying Flora received her last kiss, and when she was buried the little nymph insisted on remaining at the grave and had to be carried away

against her will. Many times after that when she was found missing, her sisters did not find her until they went to the grave. There they always found her, watering the flowers that she had planted there.

While the nymphs were still chatting, Flora, leaving her throne, requested Beatrice to occupy it, announcing her wish to honor the memory of her dead sister on coronation day by visiting her grave in her queenly robes.

Having kissed her sisters, the little queen turned to go. As if she had forgotten her intention, she turned suddenly to Ruby, who stood near. "Ruby, dear," said she sweetly, "I should like to have you walk with me, if you will."

"Thank you," said Ruby, "I will go!"

Arm in arm they slowly walked away and out of sight behind the trees, while the nymphs went on with their play.

"I cannot tell you how dearly I loved the girl whose grave we are going to visit," said Flora sadly. "She was the sweetest creature that I ever had seen, and although I ought not say it, I loved her more than any of my sisters. My great love for her resulted from a kindness shown me when first I met her.

"I was by myself playing among some bowlders on the shore when I fell on a rock and sprained my ankle.

My pain was so great that I could not make my way to the water, and I had almost given up hope of getting help when Myra appeared. She brought cold water from a spring and bathed my foot in it. In a few minutes I felt much relieved, but I knew that I could not swim to the island even if I had been able to reach the water, for pain had made me very weak. Kind hearted Myra volunteered to go for help, and having brought more cold water, she set out to find my sisters, who were a mile away. She returned with them and our queen offered her many gifts, but she declined all, saying that she had done only her duty, and declaring that one ought not expect to be rewarded for doing one's duty. The queen was so well pleased that she made her a member of the family. But she did not live long to make us happy, for on the thirtieth day after her adoption, a snake bit her and she died."

They were at the grave. Flora finished her story, and there were tears on her cheeks.

Before them was a little mound of earth and a small marble slab with a faded wreath of flowers on it. On the mound lay some shells and other ornaments that Flora had placed there. Flowers that had been planted there were dry and withered, for the little gravetender had a long way to go, and water had to be carried in a small shell.

The little queen of the day appeared very sad. "I am going to remain here to watch over this grave," she said, new tears filling her eyes. "I will keep it bright with my own love. Ruby, dear, please tell my sisters what you heard me say, for I will not return to them. I am going to become a rose to grow upon this grave and guard it forever. Take one of the small shells that you see by the marble there and when I have become a rose, bring water from the lake and pour it on me. Then return to my sisters and tell them what you saw me do. They will understand. Come, now, dear Ruby, kiss me good-bye!" She offered her sweet lips and stretched out her arms.

Ruby was filled with fear. She did not understand the strange words. "Oh, sweet little queen," she cried, taking the nymph in her arms, kissing her, "I beg of you not to talk about leaving your sisters! It would be unkind of you to leave them! I pray you return with me!"

Flora was silent. On her face was a sad smile and in her tear-wet eyes there was a strange light. She made no answer to the words of her friend. Her head and arms were bare, and her face was turned to the sky. As she reached up her arms to the sun, her long black hair fell loose almost to her feet.

Again Ruby pleaded for the life of the nymph, but in

vain. Her eyes were closed. The strange transformation had begun.

Flora's cheeks grew redder and took the form of petals, and the lips smiled sweeter as they sent out the first breath of perfume. The white arms became branches, and the fingers changed to leaves. The slender body became a green stem, and the feet roots that attached themselves to the soil. In a moment it had been done. Flora, the pretty little queen of the day, had been transformed to a rose bush on which appeared two sweet, red roses!

So great was the surprise of Ruby at what she had seen that she was unable for a time to move from the spot. But she remembered the nymph's request, and taking up a shell from the mound, she went to the lake and filled it. Returning with it, she poured the water on the roots of the bush. Then she kissed the roses and returned to the nymphs.

She found Beatrice and her sisters and Ruth seated just where they had been playing before she and Flora went away, and related to them what had happened.

The news of Flora's strange act did not create much surprise, for it seemed that the nymphs had long been expecting her to do something of that kind.

"Dear little sister," said Beatrice, thoughtfully, as the nymphs replaced her own crown on her head, "I

hope that she is happy with the one that was so dear to her!"

Dinner was spread on the grassy slope, and the nymphs and their guests ate heartily, as if nothing unusual had occurred. The conversation was none the less gay, for the queen explained to her guests that it was no occasion for sorrow when a nymph had sought by transformation to change her lot.

Nevertheless, after dinner all the nymphs went to the grave to pay their respects to their late sister. They brought water in shells and poured it on the bush, and they kissed the roses as if they had been the cheeks of the nymph.

In the evening, all returned to the island very tired and sleepy.

CHAPTER IX.

NEWS FROM HOME.

Queen Beatrice always rose at the same hour—four o'clock—no matter whether she had gone to bed early or late. It was not her custom to arouse her sisters before five, and occasionally she permitted them to sleep as late as six. She had intended to allow them to rest until seven o'clock on the morning after the nymphs' picnic, but on going to her room she found a letter on her desk that called for immediate delivery.

Lady Ruth Gray,
Nymph Lake,
Mars,
In care Queen Beatrice. Solar System.

“I will wake the whole family,” thought Beatrice. “This letter will make a change in the programme, I’m certain.” She touched a button, and a dozen bells in as many different chambers rang out their quick warnings to the drowsy nymphs. It did not take many minutes for the girls to dress, for they knew that there was something unusual going to occur. In exactly ten minutes they all appeared in the dining room ready for the morning meal.

The letter was handed to Ruth, who was more than surprised to receive a letter while in that far away land. She was about to excuse herself from the room, but the queen foresaw it and bade her remain and read where she was.

Ruth read the neat superscription again and again, but she did not seem to recognize the writing. Little wonder!

We must not judge her stupid because she did not

open the letter and learn at once the name of the writer, instead of trying to guess it, for it is one of the tantalizing joys of life on receiving a strange letter to keep one's self in ignorance of its contents for at least a moment or two. It is the same perverse notion that causes one to torment a sore tooth.

Another strange thing is the fact that very often one feels a livelier interest in the affairs of others than one feels in one's own affairs. Ruby grew deeply interested in her cousin's letter; but it was not a selfish interest. She was extremely anxious to have it quickly opened, and becoming impatient, unable to restrain her desire, she spoke to the point—"I beg pardon, cousin, but why don't you open the letter?"

Ruth's fingers trembled with excitement as she pinched away the end of the envelope. "I'm—I'm afraid it's word to come home!" she muttered. It was a long sixty seconds—to Ruby, at least—until the sheet was withdrawn from its covering of dainty pink linen.

Ruth read with nervous haste. Her eyes brightened, her cheeks colored, and a smile parted her red lips. "Read it, cousin," said she, handing the letter to Ruby.

Ruby's eyes sparkled with satisfaction. She read to herself—

King's Palace,

May 10th, 19—

Dear Lady :—His Majesty, the King of the Air, instructs me to send to you the joyous news of the birth, last night, of your new little baby brother ; and furthermore, he wishes me to send his congratulations.

If you decide to return today, you are advised to begin your journey at ten o'clock this morning. Should you fail to leave at that hour, serious difficulties may arise to confront you.

I am your obedient servant,

LIGHT,

To Lady Ruth Gray. Messenger to the King.

Ruby kissed and congratulated her cousin. "I congratulate myself, too," she said, laughing, "on having a new cousin !"

Ruth then received the congratulations of the queen and all her sisters. "Good news, indeed," said Beatrice ; "but we shall be robbed of your company. We shall be lonely without you, for you have been to us like sisters !"

"And you have been kind to us," replied Ruth. "You do us an honor when you liken us to your good sisters. We are truly grateful, and I assure you that, although the distance that will separate us be great, the bond of love will unite us, and we shall be near one another in spirit, if not in the flesh "

All sat down to breakfast. Their last meal taken together was heartily enjoyed, and as soon as the dishes had been put away, the nymphs arrayed themselves in new robes and prepared to escort their friends to the shore of the lake.

The light of the dawn revealed a fleet of fifteen shell-boats that lay at anchor in the quiet harbor of the island, and long before the sun raised his golden head over the horizon, each boat with a single passenger aboard was drifting out on the calm waters.

"Sunrise," the royal craft with the queen aboard, took the lead and was closely followed by the boats bearing the cousins and the nymphs. The boats sailed in pairs, nicely distanced and evenly abreast. The morning sunshine was like a shower of gold, and the breeze that came from the shore was like a spray of delicate perfume. There was plenty of music and song, for Beatrice had not forgotten to bring her silver cornet, and the hearts of the nymphs were light, and their voices were attuned to melody.

The distance from the island to the shore being short—only two miles—the trip across was soon made; but the time was crowded with delights. According to the queen's watch there were two hours to spare, and she endeavored to arrange matters to work together and make every minute count for a separate pleasure of its own.

She had brought in her boat a chest that contained presents for the cousins. Opening it, she exhibited twenty-six beautiful gifts—two from herself and two from each of her sisters. Then, replacing all, she locked the chest and gave the key to Ruth.

The hearts of the cousins were filled with joy. They kissed the good queen and they thanked her and all her sisters with both lips and heart.

“What have we done—who are we, to deserve this?” cried Ruby. “Here you have loaded us with costly presents, as if your kind treatment had not been more than enough!”

The queen and her sisters refused to listen to her words. Beatrice took up her harp and began playing, and her sisters caught the hands of the cousins and pulled them into a dance that lasted for a quarter of an hour.

“Your pretty wand!” said Opal, addressing Ruby, who sat with her after the dance. “I should like to see its magic power.”

“Then you shall see,” said Ruby. “Show me something that you think cannot be moved by its power.”

The queen heard and was interested. “Permit me to suggest a trial,” said she jokingly.

“Certainly,” replied Ruby; “what shall it be?”

“The big red boulder, yonder.” The queen pointed

to an immense boulder that hung on the shore of the lake. "For many years it has been a menace to our peace, and I fear it will not be many days until it shall tumble into the water—perhaps some time when we shall not be expecting it to happen. It threatens us with danger."

"The boulder appears very heavy, but if it were heavy as a five-story brick, I should not despair of moving it from its place."

"It will be an interesting sight to see it tumble into the water!" remarked Pearl.

"Won't it make a great splash!" said Opal.

"We'll all be glad when its wicked old head is out of sight under water!" declared Echo.

"I wonder what's under it?" said Rose.

"Kickets, buds, an' t'ings!" lisped Myrtle, with bright eyes dancing with excitement.

Ruby stood near the great boulder. "Ready!" she said, holding up her wand.

The nymphs fell into silence, but their eyes were kept widely open.

The bosom of the lake was calm, as if the waters were asleep and dreaming of the day when they should appear in the sky in the form of clouds to float over the world and see all its beauty.

The sound of Ruby's wand striking the boulder was

heard. Then followed the sounds of grinding sand and grating rock. The monster slowly raised his red head from its sandy pillow; then crumbling rocks and rolling sands gave way, and the boulder, with its foundation gone, lunged forward and downward into the deep water.

There was an awful splash followed by the hollow gurgling of the agitated waters that quickly rushed together to drown the object of their wrath, the bold disturber of their peace. A gigantic semi-circular wave was sent across the lake to the opposite shore, but its symmetry was destroyed when it reached the island. Dashing on the rocks there it splashed water half way across the land, covering the crystal palace with spray and foam.

Long after the water had become quiet over the spot where the boulder had gone down, the wave returned, but with spent force, and after a short struggle with the shore rocks, it was conquered and pacified.

When the nymphs looked upon the spot where the boulder had lain they discovered—"kickets, buds an' t'ings?" No; they found an immense stone vault that was filled with treasure of incalculable value—all manner and kinds of treasure by the bushel,—if treasure may be measured that way. They had at last discovered the long sought treasure vault of Grandmother

Opaline, who had reigned as queen a hundred years before, and who had secreted her treasure—no one knew where.

It was a lucky find for Beatrice and her sisters, and they owed it all to the cousins! It would take at least two weeks to transfer all the valuables to the queen's chest that was down deep in a cavern under Crystal Island.

It was twenty minutes to ten o'clock. What a pity it was that the girls could not remain to take part in the rejoicings of the nymphs! But the little baby brother at home needed attention, and there was rejoicing at home to be done. So, by virtue of the power of the wand, the gold car was reproduced from the cloth that Ruth carried under her belt; then the ponies were called and hitched to the car, and everything was ready for the journey homeward.

Kisses were exchanged, tears were mingled and farewells tenderly spoken. Then, smiling through their tears and still waving their hands to the group of pretty nymphs, the cousins dashed away to find the path that should lead them to their far away home.

CONCLUSION.

A path of light was let down from the sky like a ladder from a high window. The ponies saw it, and immediately they turned to follow it.

The cousins decided to make the journey against time, for their sight-seeing in Mars was at an end, and their next pleasure would be to see the new little boy that had been sent to be the brother of Ruth.

When two hours had passed, one-third of the long journey had been done. The earth's face increased in size in the same proportion that the face of Mars decreased, and still they whirled along at an enormous rate of speed.

Surely none of the "serious difficulties" hinted at in the letter "would arise to confront them," for they had started on their journey promptly at ten o'clock. There appeared no angry comet rushing through the skies. There was not even the indication of a shower of diamonds to pelt the ponies and frighten them into a run-away gallop.

Another hour passed, and a little more than one-half the distance had been put behind; but something that looked like a "difficulty" appeared on the path far ahead.

Twenty minutes' ride brought them face to face with it. It was nothing more—and unfortunately nothing

less—than a break in the path, caused by the passing of the villainous comet that they had encountered on their journey to Mars. More than one hundred feet of the path had been swept away. The cousins saw at a glance that to cross the place would then be impossible.

The ponies stood on the brink of the chasm pawing impatiently and snorting wildly.

Ruth and Ruby sat looking into each other's eyes. Each saw in the face of the other fear mingled with hope, but neither wished to say anything that might discourage the other. So, for a time nothing was said; but if their tongues were silent, their brains were not idle. With praying hearts they endeavored to think of a plan to get across.

They remembered that, on more than one occasion they had received help from the great Unseen. Should they then despair of receiving more?

They waited for many long minutes until it seemed that they had been abandoned. But to the faithful, relief always comes. Often it is delayed until the very last moment, but it never fails to arrive on time.

It was a half-despairing glance that Ruby cast up to the sky; but of that look there was born a hope. She saw an object floating in space. It was not far away, and it appeared floating down to them as a log floats down stream. "Look, Ruth," she cried, pointing up; "I think I see a piece of a comet's tail!"

Ruth saw, and her eyes brightened. "It's not a piece of comet's tail," she declared, "but a fragment of our path—the part that was swept away, and it is coming back to us! Thank the good Lord!"

In five minutes the floating object, which was, indeed, the missing portion of the path, had reached the opening. It seemed for a moment that it would float through; but one end struck the path near the car, while the other swung around and lodged against the other end of the path, where it rested securely.

The ponies dashed across and continued their spirited gallop until the good old world seemed within hearing distance once more. The car passed down through the atmosphere and came to a stop on the summit of a range of clouds.

A mile below them the cousins saw the familiar fields and their dear homes in the evening sunlight.

Suddenly the King's messenger appeared in his bright robes. There was a smile on his face as he bowed low and said—"Ladies fair and beautiful, please accept my congratulations on thy safe return. I trust that thou art both contented and happy!"

"Thank you, kind sir," said Ruth; "we are both."

"Kindly give our love to the king and thank him for his goodness!" said Ruby.

"And accept our hearty thanks for yourself!" supplemented Ruth with a kind smile.

The messenger smiled and bowed very low, twice; then he stepped into the car and drove rapidly away.

"Our chest full of presents from the nymphs!" exclaimed Ruby; "he has driven away with it!"

Ruth was about to reply, but the clouds began to melt under their feet and roll together in confusion above their heads. She felt herself sinking, and reached out to catch her cousin's hand; but Ruby had disappeared in the mist.

As Ruth continued to sink, darkness filled her eyes and she became unconscious. A few moments later she opened her eyes and saw her mother's face and felt the clasp of her hand. Then she remembered that the doctor had given her morphine.

The thorn had been removed from her foot and the doctor had gone; but no little baby brother did she see.

THE END.



